NATION

Delhi blast suspects used 'ghost' SIMs

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FPIs pull out Rs 7,608 cr in just 2 days

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B'desh won't play T20 WC in India over safety concerns

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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No more in flight use of power banks

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Passengers will no longer be allowed to use power banks during flights, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has reiterated, citing safety concerns. The DGCA confirmed that charging phones or gadgets with power banks, including via seat outlets, is prohibited. Power banks must be carried in hand baggage and not in overhead compartments, after incidents of lithium batteries overheating or catching fire. Airlines have been instructed to review safety protocols, train crew to detect fires early, maintain firefighting equipment, and inform passengers of the rules through announcements. *—Agencies*

Fire guts 500 bikes at Thrissur railway station

THRISSUR, 4 JAN

Around 500 two-wheelers were gutted in a major fire at the paid parking area of Thrissur railway station on Sunday, officials said. The blaze broke out at around 6.20am at the tin-sheeted parking shed on the station's western side, with fire services receiving a distress call 20 minutes later. A spark from a fallen electric line hitting a covered two-wheeler is suspected to have caused the fire. Five fire tenders were deployed and the blaze was brought under control by 7.45am, preventing it from spreading to the platforms. The shed was completely destroyed, along with equipment, cash and personal items. *—PTI*

2 dead in Odisha illegal quarry rock collapse

BHUBANESWAR, 4 JAN

At least two people died after rocks collapsed at an unauthorised stone quarry in Odisha's Dhenkanal district on Saturday evening. The incident occurred near Gopalpur village under Motanga police station, where workers were engaged in drilling and stone extraction. The cause of the collapse remains unclear. Rescue operations were conducted by the local fire service, Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF) and a dog squad, with Dhenkanal Collector Ashish Ishwar Patil and SP Abhinav Sonkar supervising. One victim was from Balasore, the other from Keonjhar or Mayurbhanj. The quarry's blasting permission had expired in September. *—PTI*

Nepal towns near India border see communal clash

KATHMANDU, 4 JAN

Protests erupted in southern Nepal on Sunday, near the Indian border, over a video with alleged religious content. In Birgunj, police used tear gas to control violent demonstrations after locals protested the vandalisation of a mosque in Dhanusha district, allegedly by two Muslim youths spreading anti-Hindu content on social media. Police detained three individuals linked to the TikTok video and vandalism. Muslims protesting in Birgunj burned tyres and pelted stones at police, prompting the use of tear gas shells. The district administration urged calm, warning against activities that threaten social harmony and vowing to take legal action against those spreading false rumours or damaging sites. *—PTI*

After govt's rap, X to remove illegal content & ban offenders

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Microblogging site X will act against illegal content by removing it, permanently suspending accounts that uploaded the material and working with governments, the Elon Musk-owned social media platform said on Sunday.

The statement from the Global Government Affairs account of X was issued hours after it said people using the platform's AI service, Grok, to create illegal content will face the same consequences as those uploading illegal content.

Global Government Affairs reiterated Musk's stance on illegal content.

"We take action against illegal content on X, including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), by removing it, permanently suspending accounts, and working with local governments and law enforcement. Anyone using Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as uploading illegal content," Global Government Affairs said on X.

- India had asked X to remove all vulgar, obscene and unlawful content, especially generated using the AI app Grok.

The Global Government Affairs handle also shared a link containing X rules, which allows the sharing of "consensually produced and distributed adult nudity or sexual behaviour, provided it's properly labelled and not prominently displayed."

The statement from Musk and Global Government Affairs follows a direction from the Union Ministry of Electronics and IT (Meity), issued on 2 January, to immediately remove all vulgar, obscene and unlawful content, especially generated using the AI app Grok, or face action.

Meity has directed X to take action against offending content, users and accounts.

The ministry asked the US-based social media firm to submit a detailed action taken report (ATR) within 72 hours of the date the order was issued. *—PTI*

Uttara Kannada woman killed, accused found dead

Yellapur tense as Hindu outfits allege 'love jihad', call for bandh

KARWAR, 4 JAN

A 30-year-old Dalit woman was stabbed to death on a public street in Yellapur town of Uttara Kannada district on Saturday, allegedly by a man known to her, police said. The accused, identified as Rafique Imamsab, was later found dead, having died by suicide.

While initial reports stated that Rafique was found hanging from a tree in a nearby forest on Sunday, Uttara Kannada Superintendent of Police Deepan MN clarified that the accused was found hanging at his residence in Kalammana Nagar, Yellapur.

The victim is Ranjitha Bhanasode, a resident of Kalammana Nagar. Police said Ranjitha and Rafique were childhood friends. Preliminary investigations indicate that Rafique had been pressuring her to marry him. When she refused, he allegedly attacked her with a knife in public on Saturday afternoon as she was returning home from work.

Ranjitha had married Sachin Katera of Solapur, Maharashtra, about 12 years ago and had a 10-year-old son. Police said she was divorced around a decade ago and had since been living with her family in Yellapur. She was working as a mid-day meal helper at a government school. According to the police, Rafique frequently visited her home for meals, but tensions grew over his insistence on marriage, which was opposed by Ranjitha and her family.

The murder sparked communal unrest in Yellapur, with several Hindu organisations calling for a bandh on Sunday, alleging the killing was a case of "Love Jihad." The bandh was later withdrawn and replaced with peaceful protests. Sri Ram Sena chief Pramod Muthalik described the incident as a "100 per cent case of Love Jihad targeting single women, widows, or divorcees." *—Salar News*

Insurance now must for K'taka med staff

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

The Karnataka government has decided to make term insurance mandatory for all doctors, officers and staff under the Medical Education and Skill Development Department, Minister Sharan Prakash Patil said on Sunday. The decision follows the death of IAS officer Mahantesh Bilagi in a road accident last month, where a technical oversight led to his family receiving Rs 50 lakh less than the entitled compensation.

The medical education department found the officer had not updated his service status in the term insurance system after his promotion to the IAS. The lapse had financial consequences for the bereaved family.

The minister said several employees, particularly those with lower pay, may miss out on adequate term insurance due to financial constraints or low awareness. Patil said he directed the Additional Chief Secretary to issue a circular mandating medical college and hospital staff to enrol in term insurance schemes aligned with their salary and designation. Patil said he has directed officials to consider migrating experienced outsourced staff into contract positions, following the reservation roster, instead of fresh temporary recruitment. He announced that the department would examine the feasibility of extending term insurance benefits to contract employees as part of a broader social security measure. Officials have been instructed to engage leading banks and insurance companies to offer the best possible term insurance schemes at affordable premiums. *—PTI*

Venezuelan Vice Prez named acting President

CARACAS, 4 JAN

Venezuela's Supreme Court has directed Vice President Delcy Rodriguez to assume the role of acting President after the US bombed Caracas and arrested President Nicolas Maduro and his wife.

The ruling, announced late Saturday local time, concluded that Maduro is in a "material and temporary impossibility to exercise his functions".

President Donald Trump had earlier said that he had spoken to Rodriguez where they agreed that the US would "run" Venezuela to protect its oil infrastructure. Rodriguez denied this.

Rodriguez, a Maduro loyalist, was born in Caracas on 18 May, 1969. She is the daughter of left-wing guerrilla fighter Jorge Antonio Rodriguez, who founded the revolutionary Liga Socialista party in the 1970s.

She spent more than two decades as one of the influential figures of Chavismo, the political movement founded by former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. Maduro claimed to be a follower of the movement.

Maduro, meanwhile, arrived in New York, where he was escorted into a high-security prison facility.

Delcy Rodriguez
PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Trump had said that Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, would be tried for "narco-terrorism".

UNEASY CALM IN CARACAS

Venezuela's capital Caracas was unusually quiet on Sunday with few vehicles moving around. Convenience stores, gas stations and other businesses were mostly closed, as some demonstrators celebrated Maduro's arrests, while his supports denounced the imperialism.

Outside the capital, in La Guira state, families with houses damaged in blasts during the operation that captured Maduro and his wife were still cleaning up debris. Some buildings were left with walls gaping open. *—Agencies*

India concerned over US action on Venezuela

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

India on Sunday voiced "deep concern" over the US' capture of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his wife in a military operation and called for a peaceful resolution of the issues to ensure stability in the region.

In its first reaction to the unprecedented American action in Venezuelan capital Caracas early on Saturday, New Delhi also reaffirmed its support for the well-being of the people of the oil-rich South American country and said it is closely monitoring the unfolding developments.

"Recent developments in Venezuela are a matter of deep concern. We are closely monitoring the evolving situation," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"India reaffirms its support to the well-being and safety of the people of Venezuela," it added. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pgs 3, 5, 6

RAM RAHIM GRANTED PAROLE FOR 15TH TIME

CHANDIGARH, 4 JAN

Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, who is serving a 20-year jail term for raping two of his disciples and is currently in the Sunaria jail in Rohtak, was again granted a 40-day parole, said sources on Sunday.

His latest parole comes months after he was granted a similar parole in August.

Singh will be coming out of prison for the 15th time after he was convicted in 2017.

The Dera Sacha Sauda head is serving a 20-year sentence given in 2017 for raping two of his disciples.

Singh and three others were also convicted in 2019 for the murder of a journalist more than 16 years ago. He was granted a 21-day furlough in April 2025 and a 30-day parole in January 2025, ahead of the February 5 Delhi assembly polls. Similarly, he was allowed a 20-day parole on 1 October, 2024, days before the 5 October Haryana polls. *— PTI*

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CANVAS COMES ALIVE

An artist arranges his paintings at Chitra Santhe, the annual art fair held at Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Bengaluru, on Sunday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Citizens take out 'Do or Die' protest for dogs

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Dog lovers, experts and activists gathered for a demonstration at the Jantar Mantar here over the Supreme Court's recent order to remove street dogs from public spaces, demanding an evidence-based, lawful and humane policy on stray dogs.

Ahead of the SC's next hearing on the matter on 7 January, the protesters, gathered under the banner 'Do or Die,' called for an immediate stay on the mass removal of 'community' dogs. The demonstrators held placards saying 'Stop the massacre, every life matters.' Simultaneously, demonstrations were held in around 50 cities across the country, including in Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Trivandrum. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Animal rights activists hold a protest ahead of Supreme Court's ruling on dogs in Bengaluru on Sunday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

THE UNSEEN CRISIS

85% Indians with mental illness go untreated

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) has expressed deep concern over the high mental health treatment gap in India, noting that nearly 80-85 per cent of individuals suffering from psychiatric disorders do not receive timely or appropriate care.

This stark reality, which is supported by national and global evidence, was highlighted during the curtain raiser of the 77th Annual National Conference of the Indian Psychiatric Society, ANCIPS 2026, being held from 28-31 January in Delhi.

Mental health experts warned that despite advances in treatment and increasing awareness, the majority of people with mental illness continue to remain outside the healthcare system.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Data from the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) indicates that India faces one of the widest treatment gaps in the world, with over 85 per cent of people suffering from mental disorders not receiving treatment.

In a global context, around 70 pc of individuals with mental illness do not receive care from trained healthcare professionals, and in many low-income countries, fewer than 10 per cent of patients access necessary treatment.

India, with its vast population and limited mental health infrastructure, remains particularly vulnerable to this challenge.

- Mental health experts warned that despite advances in treatment and increasing awareness, the majority of people with mental illness continue to remain outside the healthcare system.

Dr Savita Malhotra, President of the Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS), emphasised that mental illnesses are among the most treatable medical conditions if identified early. *— PTI*

Govt launches Market Intervention Scheme for maize farmers

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

In a major relief to maize-growing farmers facing distress sales due to a sharp fall in market prices, the State government on Sunday approved a Market Intervention Scheme for the 2025-26 kharif season to compensate farmers for price shortfalls below the benchmark rate.

Under the scheme, a Market Intervention Price (MIP) of up to Rs 2,150 per quintal has been fixed for maize. The decision follows record maize production in the State during the current kharif season, a government order said.

According to official estimates, maize was cultivated over 17.64 lakh hectares during 2025-26, with an expected output of 53.80 lakh metric tonnes—a significant increase compared to previous years.

Government data shows that between August and December 2025, around 20.50 lakh metric tonnes of maize arrived in Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs), accounting for over 38 per cent of total production. However, market prices ranged between Rs 1,600 and Rs 2,000 per quintal, forcing farmers to sell under pressure.

Farmers who have already supplied maize for ethanol production, poultry or cattle feed units, or to the KMF will not be eligible under the scheme.

Under the MIS, maize transactions up to a maximum of four lakh metric tonnes will be permitted through the Unified Market Platform (UMP) in notified APMC and sub-market yards. Considering the prevailing average modal price of Rs 1,900, farmers selling maize at this rate or below will receive a price difference payment of up to Rs 250 per quintal.

The compensation will reduce progressively as market prices rise and will not apply if prices reach Rs 2,150 per quintal or above.

The benefit is capped at 50 quintals per farmer with a ceiling of 12 quintals per acre.

Implementation will be carried out by the Karnataka State Cooperative Marketing Federation (KSCMF), with farmer registration conducted using biometric authentication. Payments will be made directly to farmers' bank accounts through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). *—PTI*

26 held for Ballari clash; Govt mulls CID probe

10 Cong, 11 BJP workers held; DKS gets factfinding report

BALLARI, 4 JAN

Police said they had arrested 26 people in connection with the violent clash at Ballari, while Home Minister G Parameshwara said the government was mulling handing over the probe into the case to CID.

One person was killed by gunfire during a clash over the erection of a banner for the unveiling of Valmiki statue on 1 January.

Ten Congress workers and 11 BJP workers were among those arrested, all of whom were taken into custody after undergoing medical examinations as part of the arrest procedure, a police statement said. Six cases have been registered at the Brucepet police station.

The violence stemmed from disputes over the erection of banners and buntings between supporters of Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy and BJP MLA G Janardhan Reddy.

> **Police will investigate whether guns or hand grenades were used.... There was no commotion till Janardhan came to Ballari. We will investigate that**
>
> -G Parameshwara, Home Minister

Meanwhile, Parameshwara reiterated that the government believed the firing didn't happen with a police gun.

He said the government was mulling handing over to the case to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) or to a Special Investigation Team (SIT).

"There are possibilities of giving the matter to the CID. I will speak to CM Siddaramaiah," he said.

He said strict action would follow if the involvement of private gunmen was established. "Police will investigate whether guns or hand grenades were used".

The HM also pointed to the sequence of events leading to the violence. "There was no commotion till Janardhan came to Ballari," he claimed. "We will investigate that."

Meanwhile, police have detained two private gunmen Baljit Singh and Gurucharan.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that the Congress' fact finding committee headed by former minister HM Revanna has collected important information. "He has presented formal and informal information."

—Salar News with agencies

Ballari clashes: BJP MLA Janardhan demands Z security

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

BJP MLA G Janardhan Reddy has written separate letters to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, demanding immediate Z-category security for him, alleging there was a "preplanned assassination attempt" on him in Ballari.

He was referring to 1 January clashes that erupted over installation of a banner for unveiling of Valmiki statue. Janardhan claimed that there was "complete breakdown of law and order". Janardhan, among others, has been booked with regard to the clashes.

In his letter to Siddaramaiah on Saturday, Reddy claimed that the attack on his Ballari residence was "not an ordinary political clash, but a preplanned and systematic assassination attempt allegedly carried out by Ballari Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy and his associates".

The former minister squarely blamed the local police for inaction and negligence, saying the threat to his life had reached the "highest possible level".

"Bharath's close aide Sathish Reddy, along with 40-50 armed men, trespassed into my premises carrying bottles, stones, clubs and deadly weapons, sat inside the compound and openly issued threats, while police remained mute spectators," he alleged.

He further claimed that at around 9pm, Bharat himself arrived near the SP Circle with hundreds of supporters armed with clubs, stones and petrol bombs, triggering a "terror-style attack".

Reddy demanded 'Z' category or equivalent high-level police security for him and his family with immediate effect.

In a separate representation to Shah, Reddy requested security through central forces, alleging that the Congress-led State government had failed in providing security. *—PTI*

BYV slams HM over Dalit woman murder

KARWAR, 4 JAN

- After a Dalit woman was allegedly murdered in Yellapur for refusing a marriage proposal from a Muslim man, Vijayendra said that Hindu women are being increasingly threatened

State BJP President BY Vijayendra tore into the Congress government after a Dalit woman was allegedly murdered for rejecting a marriage proposal in Yellapur, Uttara Kannada. He said the killing exposed how the "police machinery has been rendered toothless under a clueless Home Minister" who "routinely appears to be the last person to learn about grave crimes".

"This heinous act exposes a complete collapse of law and order in the State," he said in a statement on Sunday.

He added that incident "underscores the growing vulnerability of Hindus in the state, under a regime that is perceived to be soft and accommodative towards jihadist elements".

Vijayendra was part of a delegation visiting the site and met the woman's family.

Vijayendra alleged that the Chief Minister and Home Minister were too busy with an internal power struggle, allowing criminals to grow emboldened and create an atmosphere of fear among Hindu women.

He alleged that crimes against women have skyrocketed under the Congress government. *—Salar News*

State BJP President BY Vijayendra visited the family of the deceased in Yellapur, Uttara Kanada, on Sunday **PHOTO: X@BYVijayendra**

2 held for posting 'defamatory' content against Darshan's wife

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

Two more persons have been arrested for allegedly posting defamatory and obscene content on social media against the wife of jailed Kannada actor Darshan, police said on Sunday.

Vijayalakshmi, Darshan's wife, approached the Cyber Crime Police Station on 24 December 2025, alleging that many individuals were harassing her and her family with abusive content on social media platforms.

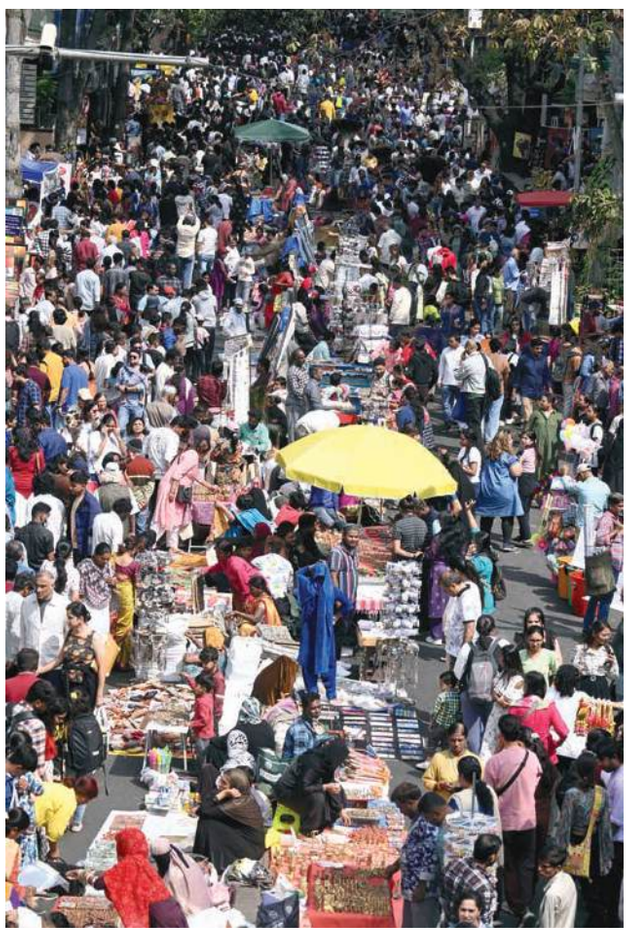
The victim had sought action against 18 persons who had posted defamatory content. A case was registered, and an investigation was launched, police said.

During the probe's initial phase, two people were arrested for posting obscene messages.

On 4 January, the police arrested Nagaraj Gullappa Talawar, 23, a petrol bunk manager from Keshavapura in Hubballi, and Prashanth Talawar, 23, an auditor from Yalawal in Dharwad, and began questioning them.

Efforts are continuing to trace the other persons involved in posting defamatory content on social media, police said.

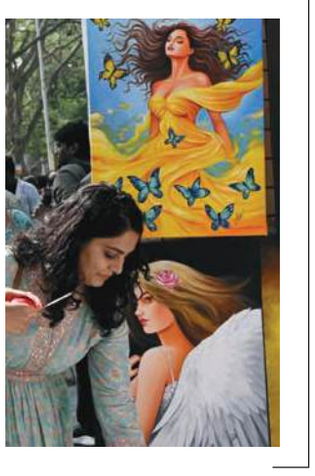
Darshan is in jail in connection with the murder of his fan Renukaswamy. *—PTI*



CHITRA SANTHE

People throng to see the vibrant 'Chitra Santhe', the City's annual art fair held at Chitrakala Parishat. Held on the first Sunday of January, 'Chitra Santhe' sees folk and modern artists from various cities decorate the roads with their paintings and handlooms. The 23rd edition of the fair was themed around environmental issues, with topics such as the Aravali range and human-animal conflicts depicted in the works. At least 1,500 stalls were set up where artists sold their work

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD



Aeronautical Dvpt Agency must stick to timelines: IAF chief

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, while speaking at the 'Aeronautics 2047' seminar in Bengaluru, emphasised that the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) must strictly adhere to delivery timelines. In a rapidly evolving security environment, he stressed that timely induction of indigenous platforms is vital for the Indian Air Force's (IAF) operational readiness.

The event marked 25 years of the LCA Tejas flight programme, a milestone in India's pursuit of self-reliance. To date, 38 aircraft have been inducted into two squadrons, completing over 5,600 successful flight trials. Key indigenous technologies developed for this fourth-generation fighter include: Fly-by-wire flight control systems, advanced carbon composites and lightweight materials, and digital utility management and glass cockpits.

While the LCA Mk-1A aims to meet current needs, the LCA Mk-II and Navy variants are currently under development. DRDO Chairman Samir V Kamat reiterated that cutting-edge indigenous technology is essential to achieving the "Viksit Bharat 2047". *—PTI*

'DAMAGING THE ENVIRONMENT'

Stop commercialising Chamundi Hills: Activists

MYSURU, 4 JAN

Hundreds of activists and Mysuru city residents with their children protested against the commercialisation of the Chamundi Hills on Sunday. They climbed the hills and gathered near the Sri Chamundeshwari temple.

Various seers and activists urged the State government to immediately stop all construction works including those that were taken up under the Union Government sponsored Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) scheme.

The project kicked off on Saturday after a three-year delay, with the Central government funding Rs 45.71 crore rupees, while the State government would contribute Rs 16.28 crore. The project, which says it aims to beautify Chamundi Hills, will utilise nearly 5 acres to develop a parking lot.

Various activists protest atop Chamundi Hills, on Sunday **PHOTO: SALAR**

Activists say such fresh constructions only add to the concretisation of Chamundi Hills and will erode its forest cover.

The protest was organised by Parisarakkagi Naavu (People for Environment) in association with Mysuru Grahakara Parishat, Team Mysuru, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Belavala Foundation, Mysuru Cultural Association and other organisations.

Parusharame Gowda from People for Environment said they are seeking an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and a study to establish the carrying capacity of Chamundi Hills. In its absence, projects like PRASAD are being pushed through to the detriment of the environment in Chamundi Hills.

Heritage expert NS Rangaraju said that Sri Chamundeshwari Kshetra Development Authority should have expert members to prevent unscientific construction projects.

The protesters also called upon the Forest Department to strictly implement the bans on plastic and activities such as the consumption of alcohol on the Hill, which is a reserve forest. They said that the government should take action against the illegal encroachments and relocate the shops and houses to the foot of the Hill.

Ex-MUDA chairman HV Rajiv, Kappatagudda Shivakumar Swamiji, Nidososi Mutt Siddalingeshwara Swamiji, and others took part. *—Salar News*

Police register POCSO case against 3 minor boys

HUBBALLI, 4 JAN

The police registered a Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) case against three minor boys aged between 14 and 15 for alleged sexual harassment in Hubbali.

Police said the boys assaulted the girl for over a week, while the girl's parents were away during the day.

"A complaint was filed saying that a minor girl was subjected to sexual harassment and assaulted by the three boys. We have taken them into custody," N Shashikumar, the Police Commissioner of Hubballi-Dharwad, said.

"These boys committed sexual offences against the girl during the last seven to eight days. The parents of the girl are working, and they used to be away during the day," the Police Commissioner added.

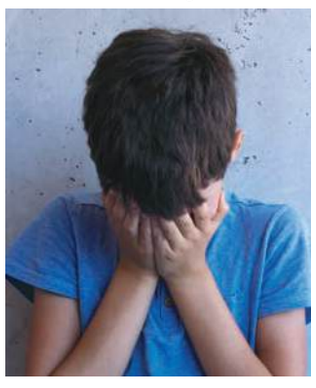


PHOTO: FREEPIK

Shashikumar said that the police will follow procedures under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act.

Further investigation is underway. *— ANI*

PHOTO: ANI

Delhi HC to hear Lalu's IRCTC scam petition on 5 Jan

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The Delhi High Court, on 5 January, is likely to hear the petition of RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav against a special court's order framing charges against him and his wife Rabri Devi, son Tejashwi Prasad Yadav, and 11 others in the alleged IRCTC scam case. On 13 October, the court framed charges of cheating, criminal conspiracy, and sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act against the accused. It had made a scathing observation that the land and share transactions in the case were "possibly an instance of crony capitalism fostered in the garb of eliciting private participation in the Railways' hotels at Ranchi and Puri." The former union railway minister had recently moved the High Court assailing the order. *—PTI*

Remains of Punjab man returned from Russia-Ukraine

CHANDIGARH, 4 JAN

The remains of Mandeep Kumar, a 28-year-old Punjab man who died in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, have returned to his hometown, Goraya in Jalandhar. Mandeep was allegedly lured by travel agents who promised work in Italy but took him to Russia and forced him to join the Russian army, his elder brother Jagdeep claimed. Jagdeep said he last spoke to his brother in March 2024, and the call lasted. Jagdeep went to Russia twice he spent almost three months in Russia searching for his brother. Mandeep's remains were received at the Delhi airport on Saturday. Earlier, India had demanded that Russia end its practice of recruiting Indian nationals as support staff in its military. *—PTI*

Security forces destroy militant hideout in J&K

SRINAGAR, 4 JAN

Following specific intelligence inputs, security forces have successfully neutralized and destroyed a militant hideout located within the Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir, a senior official confirmed this Sunday. The secret location was initially detected during an intensive search operation conducted throughout the dense Suchliwaran forest area in Sheeri on Saturday afternoon. As a significant part of the tactical operation, security personnel recovered a substantial cache, including two hand grenades, 24 rounds of AK-47 ammunition, a wireless antenna, an axe, one wire cutter, and two umbrellas from the concealed site. *—PTI*

NIA charges main shooters in hotel terror case

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) filed a chargesheet against two accused in 2024 Neemrana hotel firing linked to Khalistani terrorist Arsh Dala. The arrested accused, Puneet and Narinder Lalli, already have other chargesheets in their name. With this, a total of nine accused have so far been charge sheeted in the case. The attack at the hotel was carried out in September 2024 by the terrorist-gangster syndicate of Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) led by designated individual terrorist Arshdeep Singh alias Arsh Dala and the Bambiah gang, the statement said. NIA further found that the duo had been receiving funds, shelter and weapons from the syndicate on a sustained basis in a bid to promote KTF's objectives, the probe agency alleged. *—PTI*

India seeks dialogue in US-Venezuela crisis

India advised its nationals in Venezuela to restrict their movements and take caution

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

New Delhi has urged "all concerned to address issues peacefully through dialogue, ensuring peace and stability of the region" after the United States carried out a military assault on Caracas, following repeated accusations that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was involved in drug trafficking.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the Indian embassy in Caracas has been in touch with members of the Indian community and will continue to provide all possible assistance. On Saturday night, India advised its nationals to avoid all non-essential travel to Venezuela and urged those already in the country to exercise extreme caution. "All Indians who are in Venezuela for any reason are advised to exercise extreme caution, restrict their movements, and remain in contact with the Embassy of India in Caracas," MEA said. There are around 50 NRIs and 30 PIOs in Venezuela, the embassy said.

CPI(M) and other organisations hold placards during a protest against US military strikes in Venezuela at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

The operation drew widespread criticism from Latin American nations and global powers, including Russia, Brazil, and China.

Following the crisis, Venezuela's Supreme Court has asked Vice-President Delcy Rodríguez to take charge as interim president. Rodríguez had visited New Delhi in February last year for India Energy Week.

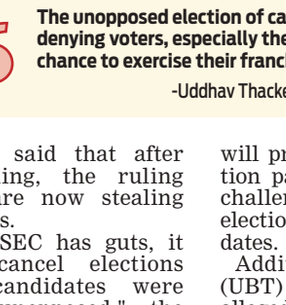
India and Venezuela share a history of warm relations, strengthened during former President Hugo Chávez's state visit to India in March 2005. The countries maintain robust cooperation in the energy sector. India's ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) holds a 40 per cent stake in the joint venture "Petrolera Indovenezolana SA" with Corporacion Venezolana del Petroleo for production and exploration at the San Cristobal oil field. OVL's investment in the project is estimated at $200 million, according to the Indian embassy. *—PTI*

Congress, Left express concern over US action on Venezuela

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The Congress and Left parties expressed "grave concern" over the US action in Venezuela and said that settled principles of international law cannot be violated unilaterally.

"The INC expresses grave concern about US actions in Venezuela. The settled principles of international law cannot be violated unilaterally," Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X.



The US attack on Venezuela is a blatant violation of UN Charter, the Left said on Sunday, raising concerns over the statements of President Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The Left parties also held a protest at the Jantar Mantar here.

Meanwhile, India voiced "deep concern" over US capturing Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, and said it is closely monitoring the situation in South American country. India also called for a peaceful resolution of the situation to ensure stability in the region and reaffirmed its support to the people of Venezuela. *—PTI*

Priyanka to lead Congress' candidate selection for Assam

GUWAHATI, 4 JAN

Congress leader **Priyanka Gandhi Vadra** has been designated as the chairperson of the screening committee responsible for candidate selection for the forthcoming Assam assembly elections. The All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal announced the formation of screening committees for five states and Union territories set to hold elections in the first half of this year.

In addition to Vadra, AICC general secretary and parliamentarian, her close aides Imran Masood and Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, both Lok Sabha MPs, along with Sirivella Prasad, will serve as members of the Assam committee. The committee is tasked with finalising candidate lists as the party aims to contest elections in alliance with other opposition parties.

- The committee is tasked with finalising candidate lists as the party aims to contest elections in alliance with other opposition parties.

The elections for Assam's 126-member assembly are expected in March-April, with Congress previously forming an alliance with the CPI(M), Raijor Dal, and others from a common platform to challenge the ruling BJP.

In a related context, Venugopal has urged Congress leaders to refrain from announcing their candidacy ahead of the assembly polls, stating, "We should not make self-announcements about candidature. Let us wait for the party's declared decision." He expressed confidence in maintaining a robust front against the CPI(M) and BJP, reflecting on the recent local body election victories that bolstered party morale.

Venugopal warned of a potential secret alliance between the CPI(M) and BJP, suggesting that such a coalition aims to safeguard specific interests leading up to the assembly elections. *—PTI*

Scrap elections where candidates won unopposed: Uddhav to SEC

MUMBAI, 4 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday demanded that civic elections where candidates, almost all from ruling parties, won unopposed should be cancelled.

Speaking along with Maharashtra Navnirman Sena President Raj Thackeray, Uddhav said that democracy has been replaced by mobocracy.

The two cousins also unveiled their alliance manifesto for Mumbai civic polls on the occasion.

Uddhav said that after his government was toppled and Eknath Shinde took over (in June 2022), the wealth of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation is being splurged on contractors.

If the BMC's expenditure budget is Rs 15,000 crore, then the amount needed to be given to contractors for different works and advance mobilisation is Rs 3 lakh crore, he claimed.

He said that this is a scam and that the kickbacks were being used for civic polls.

The BJP and its Mahayuti allies have won 68 seats unopposed in the Maharashtra civic polls scheduled for 15 January.

Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray and MNS Chief Raj Thackeray release their alliance manifesto for the upcoming civic polls, at Sena Bhavan, in Mumbai *PHOTO: PTI*

> **The unopposed election of candidates is akin to denying voters, especially the GenZ electorate, the chance to exercise their franchise**
>
> -Uddhav Thackeray, Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief

Uddhav said that after vote-stealing, the ruling parties are now stealing candidates.

"If the SEC has guts, it should cancel elections where candidates were elected unopposed," the Sena (UBT) chief said.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Sunday that the people's mandate will prevail even if opposition parties move court to challenge the unopposed election of Mahayuti candidates.

Additionally, Shiv Sena (UBT) and MNS have alleged irregularities after 32 BJP and Shiv Sena candidates were declared elected unopposed in civic polls in Maharashtra's Thane district. *—PTI*

CBI probe recommended against Kerala LoP

T'PURAM, 4 JAN

The Kerala VACB has recommended a CBI probe against the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, VD Satheesan, for alleged irregularities in collecting funds from abroad in connection with a rehabilitation project, official sources said on Saturday. The Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau's (VACB) report containing the recommendation has been submitted to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, they said.

The report says the VACB sought a CBI probe citing violations of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act.

It pointed out that Satheesan had travelled abroad after obtaining permission from the Centre for a private visit and had collected funds overseas, which were later transferred to accounts in Kerala, they said. When reporters sought his reaction, Satheesan said he would fight the matter personally and politically as per the law. *— PTI*

DISRUPTING OFFICIAL WORK

400 activists booked for dharna at Muzaffarnagar

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 4 JAN

Police have booked around 400 activists of the Bharatiya Kisan Union for allegedly disrupting official work and blocking roads using tractors after they gheraoed the SSP office here and staged a dharna on Saturday, an official said.

The BKU activists staged the protest demanding a ban on RDF (refuse-derived fuel) used in paper mills, which they claimed create pollution. Later, the dharna was called off.

Superintendent of Police (City) Satya Narayan Prajapat told reporters on Sunday that a case has been registered under Sections 191 (rioting), 132 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of duty), 126 (wrongful restraint), 351 (criminal intimidation), 352 insult with intent to provoke breach of peace) and 223 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

- The BKU activists staged the protest demanding a ban on RDF used in paper mills

The officer said over 400 BKU activists, including youth wing state president Digambar Singh and divisional president Thakur Kushal Vir, have been booked for the "illegal gherao" of SSP office and for objectionable remarks against the police. *—PTI*

Mamata urges CEC to halt SIR in West Bengal

KOLKATA, 4 JAN

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, urging him to immediately halt the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the state, and warned that it could cause "mass disenfranchisement" and "irreparable damage" to India's democratic foundations.

In a letter to the CEC dated 3 January, Banerjee expressed "grave concern" over alleged irregularities, procedural violations and administrative lapses in the conduct of the SIR in the state, asserting that the process had been undertaken in an "unplanned, ill-prepared and ad hoc manner".

She alleged that the "undue haste" and "lack of adequate groundwork" had resulted in serious defects, including faulty IT systems, inconsistent instructions and inadequate training of officials entrusted with the exercise.

Meanwhile, EC has demanded a detailed action taken report from the state police by 6 January regarding security during a recent visit by electoral roll observer C Murugan to West Bengal. *—PTI*

Cong-BJP lock horns over G RAM G Act

BHUBANESWAR/ NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

A political storm has erupted between the Congress party and the BJP on Sunday over the Modi government's replacement of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (VB-G RAM G).

The Congress announced a nationwide agitation titled "MGN REGA Bachao Sangram", held from 10 January to 25 February, opposing the new legislation and demanding restoration of MGNREGA as a rights-based law, even as the BJP and other allies asserted that the new scheme would better protect workers' interests and create durable rural assets.

Addressing a press conference in Bhubaneswar on Saturday, Surjewala claimed that the replacement of the UPA-era MGNREGA with the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act has impacted the livelihood of about 50 crore poor people. He claimed the replacement of the MGNREGA has directly impacted about 12.5 crore poor, tribal, Dalit and backward class people.

Meanwhile, Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan charged on Sunday that corruption was rampant under the MGNREGA and accused the Congress of spreading misinformation on the VB-G RAM G scheme. *—PTI*

AIADMK begins 14-day tour for poll manifesto

CHENNAI, 4 JAN

The AIADMK, led by General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, is set to embark on a 14-day statewide tour across Tamil Nadu to gather public opinion for its upcoming Assembly election manifesto.

The high-level manifesto committee, comprising senior party leaders including 'Natham' R Viswanathan, C Ponnaiyan, and RB Udhayakumar, will travel from 7 January to 20 January, aiming to collect feedback to draft what the party calls a "comprehensive and people-centric manifesto."

Key locations include Vellore, Salem, Villupuram, Tiruchirappalli, and Chennai. Palaniswami urged district secretaries to ensure public participation in providing inputs from various sectors, including farmers and traders.

In related news, Congress party in-charge for Tamil Nadu, Girish Chodankar, reaffirmed the DMK as a "trusted ally," ruling out any alliance with actor-politician Vijay's TVK for the Assembly elections. *—PTI*

Stalin announces ₹3,000 Pongal gift

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **MK Stalin** on Sunday announced a Rs 3,000 cash gift for Pongal for rice-category ration card holders and families living in Sri Lankan Tamil rehabilitation camps.

Beneficiaries will also receive a festival hamper through PDS outlets, comprising one kg each of rice and sugar, a sugarcane, and a dhoti and saree per family. The scheme is expected to benefit over 2.22 crore families and will cost the state about Rs 6,936 crore. *—PTI*

A YEAR AFTER SC'S NOD

No ad-hoc judges appointed in HCs to tackle pendency

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

No ad-hoc judges have been appointed in high courts so far to tackle pending criminal cases, nearly a year after the Supreme Court cleared the decks for it, as the high courts have not evinced interest.

According to people aware of the procedure to appoint Supreme Court and high court judges, none of the 25 high courts have recommended names for appointment as ad-hoc judges.

Concerned over the pendency of over 18 lakh criminal cases, the Supreme Court had on 30 January, 2025, allowed the high courts to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding 10 per cent of the court's total sanctioned strength.

However, the Union law ministry is yet to get any recommendation from any of the high court collegiums to appoint retired judges on an ad hoc basis.

PHOTO: PTI

- Concerned over the pendency of over 18 lakh criminal cases, the SC had on 30 January, 2025, allowed HCs to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding 10 per cent of the court's total sanctioned strength.

Article 224A of the Constitution allows the appointment of retired judges as ad-hoc judges in high courts to help manage case backlog.

According to the laid-down procedure, the respective high court collegiums send recommendations or names of candidates to be appointed as HC judges to the Department of Justice in the law ministry. The department then adds inputs and details on the candidates before forwarding them to the Supreme Court Collegium.

The SC Collegium then takes a final call and recommends to the government the appointment of the selected persons as judges.

The President signs the 'warrant of appointment' of the newly-appointed judge. *—PTI*

Delhi blast suspects used 'ghost' SIMs

Govt says this is why SIMs are must in WhatsApp as suspects used it to contact Pak handlers

SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Investigations into the terror module linked to the blast near Red Fort on last 10 November show that the "white-collar" terror module doctors such as Muzammil Ganaie and Adeel Rather used "ghost" SIM cards and encrypted apps to coordinate with Pakistani handlers, officials said on Sunday.

The probe revealed the accused followed a "dual-phone" protocol, carrying one clean phone for personal use and one "terror phone" for WhatsApp and Telegram communications with handlers in Pakistan, identified by code-names 'Ukasa', 'Faizan' and 'Hashmi'. Secondary SIMs were issued in the names of unsuspecting civilians using misused or fake Aadhaar details. Officials said similar SIM frauds were also detected in Jammu and Kashmir.

- The accused carried one "clean" phone registered in their own names, and one was the "terror phone" used exclusively for WhatsApp and Telegram communication with their handlers in Pakistan.

The discovery prompted the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to issue a directive on 28 November, 2025, requiring all messaging apps like WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, Snapchat, Sharechat and JioChat to operate only on devices with an active physical SIM. Telecom operators must log out users if no active SIM is detected, with compliance reports to be submitted to DoT within 90 days.

Security agencies noted that handlers exploited SIM-free app features to teach IED assembly via YouTube and direct "hinterland" attacks. The Srinagar Police traced the module to Al Falah University in Faridabad, leading to the arrest of Ganaie and Sayeed, and seizure of 2,900 kg of explosives.

The Red Fort car explosion killed 15 people and is under investigation by the National Investigation Agency. *— PTI*

7 booked for assaulting woman over music on NY

THANE, 4 JAN

Police have booked seven members of a family for allegedly breaking into a woman's home and assaulting her and her relatives following a dispute over loud music during New Year celebrations in Maharashtra's Thane district, officials said. The incident occurred at Vandrapada in Ambernath. Police said a quarrel broke out on the night of 31 December after the accused allegedly played loud music. Around 12.30am, the accused allegedly forced open the door of the 52-year-old woman's house and attacked her and her family members, leaving some seriously injured. The victims were hospitalised. A case has been registered under various Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Ganja plants worth Rs 100 cr destroyed in Tripura

AGARTALA, 4 JAN

total of 19 lakh premature ganja plants, worth around Rs 100 crore, were destroyed in a massive operation in Sepahijala district on Saturday, police said. A 600-strong joint team of state police, BSF and Tripura State Rifles targeted 650 acres of forest land in North and South Kalamchoura, Anandapur and Ghatigarh, acting on a tip-off. Drones were used to locate dense plantations before the day-long drive, officials said. Locals had cultivated ganja on the land, though no arrests have been made. Processed ganja is reportedly smuggled to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh for higher profits. Officials said the anti-cannabis drive will continue. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

BCCI vs B'desh: Sena(UBT) leader gets death threats

MUMBAI,, 4 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Anand Dubey on Sunday claimed he received death threats for supporting the BCCI's decision directing Kolkata Knight Riders to drop Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from the 2026 IPL squad. Dubey reportedly got threatening calls and WhatsApp messages from unidentified persons on Saturday. An NC has been filed under sections 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace) and 351(4) (criminal intimidation), with police tracing the culprits. Sharing his experience on social media, Dubey said he was abused and warned for calling the BCCI's move a "good decision" and urged police and the state government to take the matter seriously. KKR had released Rahman, bought for Rs 9.2 crore, following BCCI instructions amid rising diplomatic tensions, with the option to name a replacement for the IPL starting 26 March. *—PTI*

Ernakulam church firecracker explosion kills man

KOCHI, 4 JAN

A 68-year-old man was killed and another seriously injured in a firecracker explosion during a church celebration in Ernakulam district on Sunday, police said. The deceased, identified as Ravi from Kadathy, was handling explosives at St Peter's and St Paul's Church near Muvattupuzha when the blast occurred around 8.30am, according to the FIR. James, 46 of Valakkom suffered severe burn injuries and is reported to be in a stable condition. Both men were rushed to hospital, where Ravi later died. Police have registered a case against the parish priest and two church office-bearers. *—PTI*

Faridabad woman gangraped in ambulance, not van: Cops

FARIDABAD, 4 JAN

A new revelation has emerged in the gangrape of the 25-year-old woman, who was sexually assaulted by two men in a moving vehicle and later thrown onto the road earlier this week, that the accused committed the crime in a private hospital's ambulance and not a van.

An investigating officer on Sunday said that the accused used to work as a driver and helper on the ambulance of a private hospital.

The two accused, one from Mathura and the other from Jhansi, have been arrested.

Six days after the incident, the woman remains hospitalised.

A purported video of the victim, presumably recorded after the incident, has surfaced in which she explains that after giving her the lift, one of the accused sent Rs 600 into her account.

PTI couldn't verify the authenticity of the video

The incident occurred late Monday night after the victim visited a friend in Sector 23. While attempting to return home, she took an auto-rickshaw to NIT 2 Chowk before walking to Metro Chowk. At approximately midnight, as she waited for transport, the accused offered her a lift. Instead of heading to her destination, they allegedly drove towards Gurugram, gangraping her inside the moving ambulance. After being driven around for hours, she was thrown onto the road at 3am on Tuesday.

The Haryana state commission for women has taken cognisance. *—PTI*

Six days after the incident, the woman remains hospitalised. ***PHOTO: ANI FILE***

ELDERLY KERALA WOMAN MOLESTED AT HOME

PALAKKAD, 5 JAN

A man has been booked for allegedly attempting to sexually molest a 64-year-old woman after trespassing into her house in Alathur, Palakkad, police said. The woman, who lives alone, resisted the attack on Friday and was reportedly assaulted when she fought back. She managed to escape and seek help from a nearby house. The accused, identified as Suresh of Porulippadam and reportedly a political party worker, was traced later. Police said his arrest would be formally recorded soon. *—PTI*

It's bails and parole aplenty for rapists

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

Even as more than 90 rape cases are reported every day in India, about one every 15 to 16 minutes, convicted rapists continue to receive bail and repeated parole, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data.

One of the most prominent cases is that of self-styled godman Asaram Bapu. Convicted in 2018 for the rape of a minor and sentenced to life imprisonment, Asaram has spent over 320 days outside jail since late 2024 on medical grounds. He has faced rape allegations in 2001, 2006 and 2015. In January 2025, Supreme Court granted him interim bail, which was later extended by courts in Rajasthan and Gujarat citing age and health issues. As of 4 January, 2026, he remains out of prison under a six-month bail period.

Similarly, Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, serving a 20-year sentence for raping two disciples, is set to be released from prison for the 15th time since his conviction in 2017. He has spent more than 446 days on parole. Between 2022 and 2025, he was released multiple times each year, often close to state assembly elections, raising questions over the timing of such decisions.

- Convicted in 2018 for the rape of a minor and sentenced to life imprisonment, Asaram has spent over 320 days outside jail since 2024 on medical grounds.

In contrast, several activists and scholars continue to remain in jail for years without bail. Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam and Gulfasha Fathima have been imprisoned for nearly five years in Delhi riots.

Social activist Sonam Wangchuk was arrested on 26 September, 2025, under the National Security Act (NSA), following protests in Leh that turned violent. He has since spent around 100 days in jail without a trial. *—Salar News*

Rajnath to commission ICG ship in Goa today

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will commission the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) ship Samudra Pratap, the first of two pollution control vessels, in Goa on Monday. The ceremony will be held at Goa Shipyard Limited, Vasco, with Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, ICG Director General Paramesh Sivamani and other dignitaries in attendance.

The 114.5-metre, 4,200-ton vessel, built with over 60 per cent indigenous content, is designed for advanced pollution response operations within India's Exclusive Economic Zone and beyond. It can detect oil spills, recover viscous oil, analyse contaminants and separate oil from polluted water.

Samudra Pratap can travel over 6,000 nautical miles at speeds exceeding 22 knots. It is equipped with a 30mm CRN-91 gun, two 12.7mm stabilised remote-controlled guns, an indigenously developed integrated bridge system, platform management system, automated power management and a high-capacity external firefighting system.

The vessel will enhance ICG capabilities in pollution control, firefighting, maritime safety and security and will be based at the ICG's Kochi station. *—PTI*

Kerala files review petition against K-TET: Sivankutty

T'PURAM, 4 JAN

The Kerala government has filed a review petition in the Supreme Court challenging its verdict that made the Kerala Teacher Eligibility Test (K-TET) mandatory for teacher appointments and promotions, General Education and Labour Minister V Sivankutty said on Saturday.

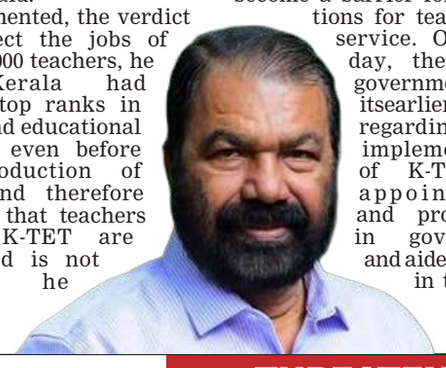
The petition seeks a reconsideration of the judgment, citing the unique characteristics of the state's education sector and the practical difficulties faced by teachers, the minister said.

If implemented, the verdict could affect the jobs of nearly 50,000 teachers, he said. Kerala had achieved top ranks in literacy and educational standards even before the introduction of K-TET, and therefore the claim that teachers without K-TET are unqualified is not logical, he explained.

- If implemented, the verdict could affect the jobs of nearly 50,000 teachers.

The government has requested that teachers who joined service before 31 March, 2012, should be exempted from K-TET, he said.

The review petition also seeks permanent exemption from K-TET for teachers holding higher qualifications like NET, SET and PhD, and has urged that the test should not become a barrier for promotions for teachers in service. On Saturday, the Kerala government froze itsearlier order regarding the implementation of K-TET for appointments and promotions in government and aided schools in the state. *— PTI*



Vet report ends buffalo ownership dispute in Kota

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Authorities in Kota resolved a rare dispute when two men claimed ownership of the same buffalo and her calf, with a veterinary medical report finally deciding the matter.

Ram Lal of Narayan Vihar reported his buffalo and calf missing a month ago. Two days ago, he spotted the animals in Indrajit Kewat's enclosure at Ramchandrapura Margiya Basti and claimed them as his own. Kewat denied the claim, insisting he had purchased the buffalo from Badi village two years ago and that it was seven years old.

The disagreement escalated, and both parties approached Kunhadi police station. Police, unable to resolve the matter, constituted a veterinary medical board. The buffalo was examined at Kota's Mokhapada government veterinary hospital. Based on teeth and physical condition, doctors confirmed the buffalo was around four to five years old.

With supporting evidence, police handed over the buffalo and calf to Ram Lal. Indrajit failed to provide further proof, and the matter was closed. *—PTI*

CAPITAL UNLIVABLE

Poor air and cold wave make it harder to breathe in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

New Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 7.4 degrees Celsius on Sunday, while the air quality was classified as 'poor.'

An isolated cold wave is expected in the city between Saturday and 6 January, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

A cold wave is declared when the minimum temperature drops by 4.5 degrees Celsius to 6.5 degrees Celsius below the average temperature.

Safdarjung recorded a minimum temperature of 7.4 degrees Celsius; Palam 6.8 degrees Celsius, and Lodhi Road 7.6 degrees Celsius.

The relative humidity was recorded at 92 per cent at 8.30 am.

Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 299 at 9 am as per the data of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 to 100 'satisfactory', 101 to 200 'moderate', 201 to 300 'poor', 301 to 400 'very poor', and 401 to 500 'severe.' *— PTI*

People warm themselves near a makeshift fire on a cold winter morning at Kashmere Gate in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

THREATENED WITH DRUG PARCEL

81-yr-old loses Rs 7 cr in 'digital arrest' fraud

HYDERABAD, 4 JAN

An 81-year-old man here was duped of Rs 7.12 crore in a "digital arrest" scam after fraudsters posing as Mumbai Police officers threatened him of involvement in drug trafficking, police said on Sunday.

The fraudsters called the victim on 27 October claiming to be from a courier company and informed that a parcel was sent on his name from Mumbai to Thailand in which MDMA, passports and some debit and credit cards were found.

They told him that they intercepted the parcel and forwarded the case to the Mumbai police.

Later, another caller called him claiming that he was from the Mumbai police and told him that he is involved in drug trafficking, money laundering and terror attacks, a police official said.

The caller asked him to transfer his money to accounts mentioned by them to "come out of the case" and that the money will be returned if the old man was found innocent. The victim was instructed not to inform anyone about the matter.

The octogenarian transferred Rs 7.12 crore over two months. The fraudsters then asked him to transfer another Rs 1.2 crore. Realising that he was duped he approached the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB) on 30 December.

Based on the complaint, a case was registered. *—PTI*

- The fraudsters called the victim on 27 October claiming to be from a courier company and informed that a parcel was sent on his name from Mumbai to Thailand.

HARYANA COPS RULE OUT 'VIP' ROLE IN ANKITA BHANDARI'S MURDER

DEHRADUN, 4 JAN

Amid calls for a CBI probe into the Ankita Bhandari murder case, Haridwar SP (Rural) Shekhar Suyal on Saturday asserted that no 'VIP' was involved in the investigation.

Bhandari, a receptionist at a resort in Pauri district, was allegedly murdered on 18 September, 2022. The state government had formed an SIT to probe the case. Suyal said the person named in chats and during questioning, Dharmendra Kumar alias Pradhan from Noida, was a friend of Ankita and not a VIP. "Investigation revealed he visited the area for work two days before Ankita's murder and briefly stopped at Vanantra Resort for food," he added. The controversy followed claims by Urmila Sanawar, who says she is the wife of former BJP MLA Suresh Rathore, releasing videos and audio alleging a 'VIP' named 'Gattu' was linked to the case. She identified Gattu as a top BJP leader in Uttarakhand. Rathore, expelled from the party, said the audios were AI-generated and widely circulated to tarnish his image.

The police continue to maintain that the investigation has not found any VIP role. *— PTI*

‘India may profit from US controlling Venezuelan oil’

A US-led takeover or restructuring of Venezuela’s oil sector could deliver a direct benefit to India, potentially unlocking close to USD 1 billion in long-pending dues while accelerating the revival of crude production from fields it operates in the sanctions-hit Latin American nation, analysts and industry sources said.

India was once a major processor of Venezuelan heavy crude, importing more than 4,00,000 barrels per day at peak levels, until sweeping US sanctions and rising compliance risks forcibly shut down purchases in 2020.

Its flagship overseas producer, ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), jointly operates the San Cristobal oilfield in eastern Venezuela, but output has been severely curtailed as US restrictions blocked access to critical technology, equipment, and services - leaving commercially viable reserves effectively stranded.

Venezuela has failed to pay OVL USD 536 million in dividends due on its 40 per cent stake in the field up to 2014, and a near-equivalent amount for the subsequent period for which Caracas has refused to permit audits, effectively freezing settlement of the claims.

Sanctions could be eased after a dramatic US operation removed President Nicolas Maduro and placed the country’s vast oil reserves under American oversight, analysts and energy executives said.

Once sanctions are eased, OVL can move rigs and other equipment from places, such as its parent ONGC’s oil fields in Gujarat, to San Cristobal to revive output that has plummeted to 5,000-10,000 barrels per day, officials in the know of the matter said.

The onshore field can produce 80,000-1,00,000 bpd with more wells and better equipment, they said, adding that San Cristobal needs rigs similar to those operating in Gujarat, and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) owns many such rigs.

US control of the Venezuelan oil sector also means exports to the world would start soon, and OVL can recoup its past USD 1 billion dues from San Cristobal from such revenues, they said.

In fact, OVL had sought a ‘specific licence’ sanctions waiver, similar to the one Office of the Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) had granted to Chevron to operate the oilfield and export oil from it.

OVL and other Indian firms can also take more fields in Venezuela and revive production from the Carabobo-1 Area - another Venezuelan heavy oilfield with Indian interest. OVL holds 11 per cent interest in Carabobo-1, while Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL) hold 3.5 per cent stake each.

Venezuelan national oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PdVSA) is the majority stakeholder in both San Cristobal and Carabobo-1.

US control of the Venezuelan oil sector also means exports to the world would start soon **PHOTO: PTI**

Post the US action, PdVSA may undergo restructuring, analysts said. In the worst-case scenario, its stake can be taken over by a US company or any new entity that Washington may erect.

OVL and other international companies - Repsol of Spain has 11 per cent stake in Carabobo-1 - are most certainly likely to continue in the projects with their holdings, analysts said.

US President Donald Trump has already stated that, as part of the takeover, major US oil companies would return to Venezuela, which has the world’s largest oil reserves, and refurbish badly degraded oil infrastructure.

Analysts said the US cannot replace all the international companies and will need firms like OVL not just for their expertise but also for the market they bring in.

India will be a key buyer of Venezuelan crude once the Latin American country is able to restore its lost glory with help from the US and other companies.

“If sanctions are eased - as seen in past geopolitical episodes, such as Panama in 1990, when aid and trade restrictions were lifted shortly after the removal of General Manuel Noriega - trade flows can resume rapidly. Under such circumstances, Venezuelan barrels could again return to Indian refineries,” said Nikhil Dubey, Senior Research Analyst at Kpler, in a post on LinkedIn.

Major Indian refiners, such as Reliance Industries, Rosneft-based Nayara Energy, IOC, HPCL-Mittal Energy and Mangalore Refinery, have the complexity needed to run these grades efficiently in blends to produce fuels like petrol and diesel.

“India is actively diversifying its crude basket - not only to reduce its dependence on Russian oil, but also amid ongoing India-US trade discussions, where lowering exposure to Russian barrels remains a key theme. In that context, if sanctions on Venezuela are eased, Venezuelan crude could offer additional flexibility to Indian refiners and help ease supply concentration risks,” Dubey said.

Before 2019, Venezuela exported 707 million barrels of crude oil a year, with the US absorbing about 32 per cent and China and India 35 per cent. By 2025, exports have declined to 352 million barrels a year, with China taking 45 per cent and unknown others 31 per cent.

Kpler Risk & Compliance expects US and allied authorities to prioritise asset freezes, criminal investigations, and the dismantling of evasive trading networks rather than immediately easing restrictions. China, Venezuela’s primary residual buyer, is likely to pause lifting until PdVSA authority and payment channels are clarified in the near term. Explaining the US move, analysts said Trump is trying to decouple the American economy from the rest of the world. With Venezuelan oil under its belt, the US will no longer be dependent on OPEC producers like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

“In a way, Trump has sent a strong message to Saudi Arabia. His logic of having discovered Venezuelan oil and so being its true owner, also holds good for the Middle East. After all, it was US firms which discovered oil in Saudi Arabia and other places, and as a corollary, it can also capture Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud,” an analyst tracking the sector said.

With its own oil and gas production and Venezuelan output, the US will no longer be dependent on any other part of the world for its energy needs.

Its dependence on China, however, continues for non-energy items, but Trump is trying to cut even that through his tariffs and encouraging local production, he said.

For the oil market, the restart of Venezuelan oil flows should bring in price stability, but Trump would not like the rates to slip below USD 60 a barrel as this would make US shale oil and gas production economically unviable, another analyst said.

“The best case for him will be to ask OPEC to lower its production to accommodate Venezuelan flows into the market.”

Venezuela holds the world’s largest proven oil reserves - 303 billion barrels, which are more than 267 billion barrels of Saudi Arabia, but output has collapsed due to underinvestment, mismanagement, and sanctions.

A US-directed overhaul - bringing capital, technology, and operational discipline - could lift production significantly within a year, adding supply to global markets, analysts say.

For India, the world’s third-largest oil importer, renewed Venezuelan exports would offer a strategic alternative to Middle Eastern crude, reduce exposure to geopolitical shocks, and strengthen its hand in price negotiations.

“Indian refiners are structurally configured for Venezuelan heavy crude,” said a former oil executive.

“If production rises and payments normalise, trade can restart almost immediately.”

Geopolitically, a US-dominated oil sector in Venezuela would also dilute China’s leverage, which currently enjoys priority access to Venezuelan crude through debt-repayment deals. Any renegotiation of those arrangements could open space for India to regain long-term supply contracts.

While legal disputes and infrastructure decay pose risks, analysts argue these are manageable under a US-backed framework. —PTI

SALAR ساہر

US’ Venezuela oil seizure plan faces hurdles

US President Donald Trump’s plan to take control of Venezuela’s oil industry and ask American companies to revitalise it after capturing President Nicolas Maduro in a raid isn’t likely to have a significant immediate impact on oil prices.

Venezuela’s oil industry is in disrepair after years of neglect and international sanctions, so it could take years and major investments before production can increase dramatically.

American oil companies will want a stable regime in the country before they are willing to invest heavily, and the political picture remained uncertain Saturday with Trump saying that the US is in charge, while the current Venezuelan vice president argued, before Venezuela’s high court ordered her to assume the role of interim president, that Maduro should be restored to power.

“But if it seems like the US is successful in running the country for the next 24 hours, I would say there would be a lot of optimism that US energy companies could come in and revitalise the Venezuelan oil industry fairly quickly,” said Phil Flynn, a senior market analyst at the Price Futures Group.

And if Venezuela can grow into an oil production powerhouse, Flynn said, “that could cement lower prices for the longer term” and put more pressure on Russia.

Venezuela has the world’s largest proven crude oil reserves of approximately 303 billion barrels, according to the US Energy Information Administration. That accounts for roughly 17 per cent of all global oil reserves.

Leading companies, including Exxon Mobil and Chevron, didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment on Saturday. ConocoPhillips spokesperson Dennis Nuss said by email that the company “is monitoring developments in Venezuela and their potential implications for global energy supply and stability. It would be premature to speculate on any future business activities or investments.”

Chevron is the only one with significant operations in Venezuela, where it produces about 2,50,000 barrels a day. Chevron, which first invested in Venezuela in the 1920s, does business in the country through joint ventures with the state-owned company Petroleos de Venezuela SA, commonly known as PDVSA.

But even with those massive reserves, Venezuela has been producing less than 1 per cent of the world’s crude oil supply. Corruption, mismanagement and US economic sanctions saw production steadily decline from the 3.5 million barrels per day pumped in 1999 to today’s levels.

The problem isn’t finding the oil. It’s a question of the political environment and whether companies can count on the government to live up to their contracts. Back in 2007, then-president Hugo Chavez nationalised much of the oil production and forced major players like ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips out.

“The issue is not just that the infrastructure is in bad shape, but it’s mostly about how you get foreign companies to start pouring money in before they have a clear perspective on the political stability, the contract situation and the like,” said Francisco Monaldi, who is the director of the Latin American energy program at Rice University.

But the infrastructure does need significant investment.

“The estimate is that in order for Venezuela to increase from one million barrels per day — that is what it produces today — to four million barrels, it will take about a decade and about a hundred billion dollars of investment,” Monaldi said. Venezuela produces the kind of heavy crude oil that’s needed for diesel fuel, asphalt and other fuels for heavy equipment. Diesel is in short supply around the world because of the sanctions on oil from Venezuela and Russia, and because America’s lighter crude oil can’t easily replace it.

Years ago, American refineries on the Gulf Coast were optimised to handle that kind of heavy crude at a time when US oil production was falling, and Venezuelan and Mexican crude was plentiful. So refineries would love to have more access to Venezuela’s crude because it would help them operate more efficiently, and it tends to be a little cheaper.

Boosting Venezuelan production could also make it easier to put pressure on Russia because Europe and the rest of the world could get more of the diesel and heavy oil they need from Venezuela and stop buying from Russia.

“There’s been a big benefit for Russia to see Venezuela’s oil industry collapse. And the reason is that they were a competitor on the global stage for that oil market,” Flynn said.

But Matthew Waxman, a Columbia University law professor who was a national security official in the George W Bush administration, said seizing control of Venezuela’s resources opens up additional legal issues.

“A big issue will be who really owns Venezuela’s oil?” Waxman said. “An occupying military power can’t enrich itself by taking another state’s resources, but the Trump administration will probably claim that the Venezuelan government never rightfully held them.”

But Waxman, who served in the State and Defence departments and on the National Security Council under Bush, noted that “we’ve seen the administration talk very dismissively about international law when it comes to Venezuela.” —*PTI*

Venezuelans celebrate in Santiago, Chile, on Saturday, after US President Donald Trump announced that President Nicolas Maduro had been captured and flown out of Venezuela **PHOTO: PTI**

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

US planned Latin America coups, but Venezuela is unprecedented

In the dead of night during the holidays, the US launched an operation inside a Latin American country, intent on seizing its leader on the pretext that he is wanted in US courts on drug charges. The date was 20 December, 1989, the country was Panama, and the wanted man was General Manuel Noriega.

Many people in the Americas waking up on 3 January, 2026, may have been feeling a sense of déjà vu.

Images of dark US helicopters flying over a Latin American capital seemed, until recently, like a bygone relic of American imperialism – incongruous since the end of the Cold War.

But the seizure of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, along with his wife, Cilia Flores, recalls an earlier era of US foreign policy.

US President Donald Trump announced that, in an overnight operation, US troops captured and spirited the couple out of Caracas, Venezuela’s capital. It followed what Trump described as an “extraordinary military operation” involving air, land and sea forces.

Maduro and his wife were flown to New York to face drug charges. While Maduro was indicted in 2020 on charges that he led a narco-terrorism operation, his wife was only added in a fresh indictment that also included four other named Venezuelans.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he “anticipates no further action” in Venezuela, but Trump later said the he wasn’t afraid of American “boots on the ground.”

The US operation in Venezuela is a clear break from the recent past. The seizure of a foreign leader – albeit one who clung to power through dubious electoral means – amounts to a form of ad hoc imperialism, a blatant sign of the Trump administration’s aggressive but unfocused might-makes-right approach to Latin America.

It eschews the diplomatic approach that has been the hallmark of inter-American relations for decades, really since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s took away the ideological grab over potential spheres of influence in the region.

Instead, it reverts to an earlier period when gunboats sought to achieve US political aims in a neighbouring region that American officials treated as the “American lake” – as one World War II Navy officer referred to the Caribbean.

The renaming of the Gulf of Mexico as the “Gulf of America” – one of the earliest acts of the second Trump administration – fits this new policy pivot.

But in key ways, there is no precedent to the Trump administration’s operation to remove Maduro.

Never before has the US military directly intervened in South America to effect regime change.

All of Washington’s previous direct actions were in smaller, closer countries in Central America or the Caribbean.

The US intervened often in Mexico but never decapitated its leadership directly or took over the entire country.

In South America, interventions tended to be indirect: Lyndon Johnson had a backup plan in case the 1964 coup in Brazil did not succeed (it did);

Richard Nixon undermined the socialist government in Chile from 1970 on but did not orchestrate the coup against president Salvador Allende in 1973.

And while former secretary of state Henry Kissinger – who was the architect of US foreign policy under Nixon and his successor, Gerald Ford – and others encouraged repression against Leftists aligned groups throughout the 1970s, they held back from taking a direct part in it.

On 3 Jan, 1983 Panama leader Manuel Noriega was abducted by the US; former president Richard Nixon destabilised the Chilean government led by president Salvador Allende **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

WHAT IS TRUMP’S PLAN?

US officials long viewed South American countries as too far away, too big and too independent to call for direct intervention. Apparently, Trump’s officials paid that historical demarcation little heed.

What is to happen to Venezuela after Maduro? Taking him into US custody lays bare that the primary goal of a monthslong campaign of American military attacking alleged drug ships and oil tankers was always likely regime change, rather than curbing illegal drugs. As it is, next to no fentanyl leaves Venezuela, and most Venezuelan cocaine heads to Europe.

Trump no doubt wants to avoid another Iraq War disaster, and as such he will want to limit any ongoing US military and law enforcement presence.

But typically, a US force changing a Latin American regime has had to stay on the ground to install a friendly leader and maybe oversee a stable transition or elections.

Simply plucking Maduro out of Caracas does not do that.

The capture of Maduro could displace millions more Venezuelans and destabilise neighbouring countries – certainly it will affect their relationship with Washington. And while the operation to remove Maduro was clearly thought out with military precision, the concern is that less attention has been paid to an equally important aspect: what happens next.

“We’re going to run the country” until a “safe, proper and judicious transition” occurs, Trump promised. But that will be is easier said than done. —*The Conversation*

MADURO LANDS IN JAIL WITH DIDDY

The high-security 'hell on earth' has records of rights abuse

FBI agents escort Nicholas Maduro to a New York jail, on Sunday as seen in a video posted by the White House **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

A protester displays a sign reading 'We want our Nicolás (Maduro)' during a rally in Caracas, Venezuela **PHOTO: PTI**

PALM BEACH, 4 JAN

The Brooklyn jail holding former Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro is a facility so troubled, some judges have refused to send people there even as it has housed such famous inmates as music stars R Kelly and Sean "Diddy" Combs, both accused of rape. Diddy also allgedly ran a sex trafficking ring.

Opened in the early 1990s, the Metropolitan Detention Centre, or MDC Brooklyn, currently houses about 1,300 inmates.

It's the routine landing spot for people awaiting trial in federal courts in Manhattan and Brooklyn, holding alleged gangsters and drug traffickers alongside some people accused of white-collar crimes.

- Detainees have complained about rampant violence. During the winter of 2019, a power outage plunged the facility into a cold darkness for a week.

Maduro is not the first president of a country to be locked up there. Juan Orlando Hernandez, the former president of Honduras, was imprisoned at MDC Brooklyn while he was on trial for trafficking hundreds of tons of cocaine into the US. Convicted and sentenced to 45 years in prison, Hernandez was pardoned and freed by President Donald Trump in December.

Current detainees include the co-founder of Mexico's Sinaloa drug cartel, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada Garcia, and Luigi Mangione, who is accused of killing the CEO of UnitedHealthcare. Past inmates have included crypto mogul Sam Bankman-Fried and longtime Jeffrey Epstein associate Ghislaine Maxwell.

Located next to a shopping mall in a waterfront industrial area and within sight of the Statue of Liberty, the jail has been described, at its worst, as a "hell on earth" and an "ongoing tragedy."

Detainees and their lawyers have long complained about rampant violence. During the winter of 2019, a power outage plunged the facility and its inmates into a cold darkness for a week.

Recently, however, the federal Bureau of Prisons says it has improved conditions.

Maduro is likely to see some familiar faces if he is allowed out of the isolated quarters where he will initially be housed. One is co-defendant Hugo Carvajal, the former Venezuelan spy chief who broke ranks with Maduro in 2019 and has indicated that he wants to cooperate with US authorities.

There is also Anderson Zambrano-Pacheco, an alleged member of Venezuela's Tren de Aragua gang who was arrested last year in New York on firearms charges. He was among those caught on security video terrorising residents at an apartment complex, an incident that Trump seized on during his campaign. *—PTI*

'Coloniser' Cuba should now be concerned: Rubio

PALM BEACH, 4 JAN

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Saturday called Cuba's leaders "colonisers" and said that they should be concerned following the capture of Maduro and his wife.

He said Cuba was in complete collapse, and noted that Maduro's guards and the entire intelligence agency were largely composed of Cubans.

"Cuba is a disaster. It's run by incompetent, senile men," Rubio said during a press conference. "It has no economy. It's in total collapse."

"This poor island took over Venezuela. One of the biggest problems that Venezuelans have is that they have to declare independence from Cuba. They tried to basically colonise it from a security standpoint. If I lived in Havana and I was in the government, I'd be concerned at least a little bit," he said.

During the press conference, Trump added, "Cuba is a failing nation right now. We want to help the people in Cuba, but we also want to help the people who were forced out of Cuba and are living in this country."

When asked how arresting Maduro was America First, Trump had said that "we want to surround ourselves with good neighbours".

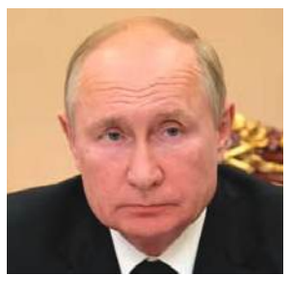
Cuba said the arrest of Maduro would "destabilise the region".

Notably, Rubio is of Cuban decent. *—Agencies*

- Rubio suggested that Cubans were trying to colonise Venezuela and said that Caracas needs to declare independence from them. He said he would be concerned if he was in Havana

WORLD LOOKS ON

Russia, China call for US to release Maduro



MOSCOW/BEIJING, 4 JAN

Russia and China urged the US to release Maduro and his wife, as they condemned the arrests. The Russian Foreign Ministry urged the US to "release the legitimately elected leaders" and stressing that issues between the two countries should be resolved through dialogue. Similarly, the Chinese Foreign Ministry saud the US should "resolve issues through dialogue and negotiation."

The move is in clear violation of international law, basic norms in international relations, and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, it said.

"China calls on the US to… stop toppling the government of Venezuela," it added.

The Chinese Ministry earlier on Saturday condemned the US airstrikes on Venezuela and the capture of Maduro and his wife, describing it as a hegemonic act that seriously violates international law.

Like Russia, Beijing's strategic partnership with Venezuela in the last two decades was built on political alignment, energy cooperation, and shared opposition to the US and Western influence in Latin America.

Both Russia and China are major buyers of Venezuela's oil, despite US sanctions. They are have also extended tens of billions of dollars in oil-backed loans. *—Agencies*

ACT OF WAR, SAYS MAMDANI

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said he spoke with President Donald Trump "directly" to "register his opposition" about the capture of Maduro and his wife, and termed the "unilateral attack on a sovereign nation" an "act of war". Mamdani said the "blatant pursuit of regime change" impacts New Yorkers, including Venezuelans who live in the city.

FRANCE SENDS MIXED SIGNALS

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot expressed a neutral stance, saying that the "voice of the Venezuelan people must take precedence". While saying the military operation undermined international law, Barrot noted that Maduro has undermined the rights and dignity of the Venezuelan people. Earlier, President Emmanuel Macron said Venezuelans can "rejoice".

CONGRATULATIONS AND SALUTATIONS: NETANYAHU

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised Trump for his leadership and the military operation in Venezuela, writing on X, "Congratulations Trump, for your bold and historic leadership on behalf of freedom and justice. I salute your decisive resolve and the brilliant action of your brave soldiers."

US didn't respect international law: UN

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said the capture of Maduro constitutes a "dangerous precedent". Guterres said that he is "deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected". He warned that the military operation "has potential worrying implications for the region". Guterres emphasised the importance of full respect of international law, including the UN Charter and calls on all actors in Venezuela to engage in inclusive dialogue, in respect of human rights and the rule of law".

Hundreds of flights cancelled during military op

WASHINGTON, 4 JAN

The US military operation also disrupted Caribbean travel at a busy travel time for the region. No airline flights were crossing over Venezuela that day, according to FlightRadar24.com.

Major airlines cancelled hundreds of flights across the eastern Caribbean region on Saturday and warned passengers that disruptions could continue for days.

Flights were cancelled to and from Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Aruba and more than a dozen other destinations in the Lesser Antilles island group north of Venezuela. Airlines waived change fees for passengers who had to reschedule flights.

On Sunday, major airlines began restoring flights. *—PTI*

This is about oil, not democracy: Kamala

Former US vice president Kamala Harris said the operation was driven by oil interests and not by concerns over drugs. Harris said on X, "Trump's actions in Venezuela do not make America safer, stronger, or more affordable. That Maduro is a brutal, illegitimate dictator does not change the fact that this action was both unlawful and unwise. We've seen this movie before. Wars for regime change or oil that are sold as strength but turn into chaos, and American families pay the price," she wrote.

Zelenskyy hints that US should topple Putin's regime next

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy hinted that the US should oust his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin the way they arrested Maduro. "If this can be done to dictators, like that, then the US know what they should do next." Zelenskyy has repeatedly called Putin a dictator.

Brains behind Maduro: Analyst on Ex-prez's wife

Foreign Affairs expert Robinder Sachdev said Maduro's wife, Cilia Flores, was the brains behind his operation. Flores, a member of the Venezuelan parliament, is considered a key figure in Maduro's administration and accused of being involved in drug trafficking. "She is a brilliant, smart lady," he said.

Via Starlink, Musk gives Venezuela free net for a month

Billionaire Elon Musk-owned Starlink announced it was providing free broadband internet services to the people Venezuela until 3 February. Musk said on X that it was "In support of the people of Venezuela". Earlier, Musk said that the arrest of Maduro was "a clear message to evil dictators everywhere".

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visits a major munitions factory at an undisclosed place on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

NORTH KOREA LAUNCHES BALLISTIC MISSILES TOWARD SEA

SEOUL, 4 JAN

North Korea launched multiple ballistic missiles toward the sea on Sunday, its neighbours said.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement it detected several ballistic missile launches from North Korea's capital region around 7.50am. It said the missiles flew about 900kms and that South Korea and US authorities were analysing details of the launches.

Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said that at least two missile launches by North Korea have been confirmed. "They are a serious problem, threatening the peace and security of our nation, the region and the world," Koizumi told reporters.

The launches were the latest weapons demonstration by North Korea.

North Korea has been focusing on testing activities to enlarge its nuclear arsenal since leader Kim Jong Un's summitry with US President Donald Trump fell apart in 2019. Kim has also boosted his diplomatic credentials by aligning with Russia over its war in Ukraine and tightening relations with China.

S KOREAN PREZ LANDS IN CHINA

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung arrived in China on Sunday as Beijing looks to deepen ties after heightened tensions between China and Japan over Taiwan, a self-ruled island it claims as its sovereign territory.

Lee's four-day trip is his first visit to China since taking office in June. He earlier reaffirmed the One-China policy, which says Taiwan is Beijing's territory. Lee is set to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping and discuss the North's nuclear proliferation. *—PTI*

3 held for Hindu man's death in Bangladesh

DHAKA, 4 JAN

Three persons were arrested on Sunday in the case of hacking and burning to death a Hindu businessman in Shariatpur district of Bangladesh, local media reports said.

Khokon Chandra Das, 50, was assaulted near Keurbhanga Bazar in Damudya in Shariatpur district, about 100 kilometres

south of Dhaka, on Wednesday night. He died on Saturday. Prothom Alo newspaper said a team of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested the three accused on Sunday morning from Kishoreganj, about 100 kilometres northeast of Dhaka.

The arrested were identified as Damudyar Sohag Khan, 27, Rabbi Molya, 21, and Palash Sardar, 25.

RAB Madaripur Camp Company Commander Superintendent of Police Mir Monir Hossain told Prothom Alo that the accused were being brought to Madaripur camp from Kishoreganj.

Das, who ran a medicine shop and mobile banking business, was travelling in an autorickshaw when the attackers intercepted the vehicle and allegedly beat him up, hacked him with sharp weapons and then poured petrol on his head before setting him on fire, media reports had said on Thursday. *—PTI*

DEATH TOLL FROM IRAN PROTESTS RISES TO 15

DUBAI, 4 JAN

Iran's ongoing protests have claimed at least 15 lives, escalating tensions as violence continues to spiral. Human rights activists report the deaths amidst demonstrations fueled by a crumbling economy. Protests have erupted in over 170 locations across 25 of Iran's 31 provinces, marking the most significant unrest since 2022.

The fatalities include a grenade explosion in Qom, which reportedly claimed the life of a man allegedly attempting to attack civilians, and a Basij member killed in Harsin during a violent altercation. These incidents reflect a troubling uptick in violence.

The state-run IRNA news agency noted unrest in Malekshahi County, with conflicting reports on security forces' actions against demonstrators. As the protests evolve, protestors have been voicing discontent not only over economic grievances but also against the Islamic Republic's regime. The current environment remains fraught with tension, as the government prepares for a harsh crackdown on dissenting voices. *—PTI*

ALLEGED WEAPON CATCHMENT

France-UK jets attack IS base in Syria

DAMASCUS, 4 JAN

In a joint operation, British and French warplanes have carried out an airstrike in central Syria on an underground facility where members of the Islamic State group were believed to have kept weapons and explosives.

The British defence ministry said Sunday that the strikes occurred Saturday evening on the structure in the mountains north of the historic town of Palmyra in the country's Homs province, the ministry's statement said.

Britain and France are part of the US-led coalition that has been fighting IS militants for more than a decade.

The British military used Typhoon FGR4 fighter jets supported by a Voyager refuelling tanker, and were joined by French aircraft.

A British Royal Air Force Typhoon aircraft during a joint opperation with French aircrafts over Syria **PHOTO: BRITISH MINISTRY OF DEFENCE**

The British air force used Paveway IV guided bombs to target several access tunnels down to the facility, the statement said, adding that while a detailed assessment is now underway, initial indications are "that the target was engaged successfully."

"This action shows our UK leadership and determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies, to stamp out any resurgence" of IS and its "violent ideologies" in the Middle East," said Defence Secretary John Healey.

There was no immediate comment from Syria's government on the strikes. Syria joined the anti-IS coalition late last year.

Despite its defeat in Syria in 2019, IS sleeper cells still carry out deadly attacks in Syria and Iraq. UN experts say IS still commands between 5,000 and 7,000 members across its former stronghold in Syria and Iraq. *—PTI*

'Andhra leads India in investment, secures 25.3%'

AMARAVATI, 4 JAN

Andhra Pradesh has emerged as India's top investment destination, capturing 25.3 per cent of all proposed investments in the first nine months of current fiscal (FY26), according to a Bank of Baroda report. The state now leads peers such as Odisha (13.1 per cent) and Maharashtra (12.8 per cent), signalling a shift in industrial momentum toward the eastern and southern corridors.

The report notes that over half (51.2 per cent) of India's total proposed capital investment is concentrated in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Maharashtra.

Nationwide, investment announcements reached Rs 26.6 lakh crore in the period, up 11.5 per cent year-on-year. Of all the investments, power is the dominant sector with a share of 22.6 per cent with renewables leading the pack. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

D-Mart Q3 revenue climbs 13% to Rs 17,612 crore

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Avenue Super marts Ltd, owner of the D-Mart retail chain, reported a 13.15 per cent rise in stand-alone revenue from operations to Rs 17,612.62 crore for the third quarter ending 31 December, 2025 the company informed the BSE. On a quarter-on-quarter basis, revenue rose 8.6 per cent from Rs 16,218.79 crore in Q2 FY26. D-Mart operated 442 stores as of 31 December, 2025 including its Sanpada outlet in Navi Mumbai, currently closed for reconstruction. The company said the figures are subject to limited statutory audit review. The board will meet on 10 January, 2026 to approve unaudited stand-alone and consolidated results. Promoted by Radhakishan Damani's family, D-Mart retails basic home and personal products across multiple states. *—PTI*

Hyderabad to get India's first trout farm

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh will inaugurate India's first commercial-scale tropical Rainbow Trout farm and research institute in Hyderabad on 5 January. Established by Smart Green Aquaculture Ltd in Ranga Reddy District, Telangana, the facility uses advanced Recirculating Aquaculture System technology, enabling year-round farming of cold-water species in tropical climates. The project shows that technology, not climate, can drive aquaculture viability. It will also provide practical training in advanced aquaculture systems, automation, and bio security for youth. Since 2015, the government has invested Rs 38,572 crore in fisheries, promoting cold-water species as high-value, export-oriented commodities. *—PTI*

ONGC to capture carbon in Gujarat's depleted wells

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) will store captured carbon dioxide (CO_2) in depleted wells at Gujarat's Gandhar oilfield, launching its first full-scale Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) pilot. The project will inject about 100 tonnes of CO_2 daily from nearby industrial sources and ONGC's Hazira plant into two abandoned onshore wells, preventing its release into the atmosphere. The pilot also aims to test enhanced oil recovery, turning CO_2 into a productive resource. Depleted reservoirs offer ideal long-term storage and allow use of existing infrastructure. The initiative supports decarbonisation, blue hydrogen production, and India's net-zero goals, with $12 billion earmarked for carbon capture and energy transition projects. *—PTI*

FPIs pull out ₹7,608 cr in just 2 days

In 2025, Indian equities recorded the largest outflow of Rs 1.66 lakh cr

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Foreign portfolio investors have started 2026 on a cautious note, extending their selling streak from last year by withdrawing Rs 7,608 crore (USD 846 million) from Indian equities in the first two trading sessions of January.

The withdrawal of funds followed the largest outflow of Rs 1.66 lakh crore (USD 18.9 billion) recorded in 2025, triggered by volatile currency movements, global trade tensions and concerns over potential US tariffs, and stretched market valuations.

This sustained selling pressure by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) has significantly contributed to the nearly 5 per cent depreciation of the rupee against the dollar during 2025. However, market experts believe the tide could turn in 2026.

VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments, said the year is likely to witness a shift in FPI strategy, as improving domestic fundamentals may start attracting net foreign inflows.

A robust GDP growth and the prospects of a recovery in corporate earnings bode well for positive FPI flows in the coming months, he added.

Echoing similar views, Vaqarjaved Khan, Senior Fundamental Analyst at Angel One, said normalisation in India-US trade relations, a benign global interest rate environment and stability in the USD-INR pair could create a favourable backdrop for foreign investors.

- Consequently, FPI flows are likely to remain highly sensitive to global cues and macroeconomic developments.

He noted that equity valuations have become relatively comforting compared to last year, which could further support a revival in inflows.

Despite these positive expectations, FPIs have begun 2026 on a cautious note, and according to data from NSDL, they pulled out nearly Rs 7,608 crore from Indian equities between 1 and 2 January.

This trend is not unusual, as foreign investors have historically remained guarded in January, having withdrawn funds in eight out of the past ten years, Khan said.

Consequently, FPI flows are likely to remain highly sensitive to global cues and macroeconomic developments. *—PTI*

Macro, global trends to drive mkts this week: Analysts

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Macroeconomic data, global cues, and foreign investor activity are expected to steer markets this week, analysts said. Ajit Mishra of Religare Broking noted that this week will be data-heavy as markets early earnings season phase, with focus on India's final Purchasing Managers' Index readings and key US and China macro releases.

Indian markets began 2026 on a strong footing. Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, said sentiment will hinge on domestic growth trends and global economic health, with US jobs data key for signals on the Federal Reserve's rate path. *—PTI*

7 top firms' mcap surges Rs 1.23 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The combined market capitalisation of seven of the top-10 most-valued firms surged Rs 1,23,724.19 crore last week, in line with an optimistic trend in equities, with Reliance Industries being the winner.

From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Larsen & Toubro and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers, while TCS, Infosys, and Bajaj Finance faced erosion from their valuation.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries jumped Rs 45,266.12 crore to Rs 21,54,978.60 crore. State Bank of India added Rs 30,414.89 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 9,22,461.77 crore. Larsen & Toubro's valuation surged Rs 16,204.34 crore to Rs 5,72,640.56 crore and Hindustan Unilever climbed Rs 14,626.21 crore to Rs 5,51,637.04 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank edged higher by Rs 13,538.43 crore to Rs 15,40,303.87 crore and ICICI Bank advanced from Rs 3,103.99 crore to Rs 9,68,773.14 crore. *—PTI*

India unaffected by US action against Venezuela: GTRI

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The ongoing crisis in Venezuela is unlikely to have any economic impact on India, according to the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI). India's trade with Venezuela is now small and declining, GTRI noted on Sunday, a day after US forces carried out a large military operation in Venezuela, capturing President Nicolas Maduro and his wife and taking them to the US to face charges including alleged narco-terrorism and drug trafficking.

India was a major buyer of Venezuelan crude in the 2000s and 2010s. However, ties have weakened sharply after 2019 as US sanctions curtailed oil imports and commercial activity. In 2024-25, India's imports from Venezuela fell to USD 364.5 million, with crude oil at USD 255.3 million—down 81.3 per cent from USD 1.4 billion in 2023-24. While India's exports to Venezuela were modest at USD 95.3 million, pharmaceuticals led the shipments.

In this emerging global order, wars for raw materials and energy resources are likely to intensify in the coming years, GTRI opined. GTRI suggested India must therefore act cautiously, protect its strategic autonomy, avoid deals that weaken sovereignty or long-term interests, and secure critical raw material and energy access without geopolitical pressure.

Securing control of Venezuelan crude oil was at the core of the US's operation, according to GTRI. Venezuela holds about 18 per cent of the world's oil reserves—more than even Saudi Arabia —and even more than the US and Russia combined, making it a critical source of upstream crude for Washington. *—ANI*

Coal India's BCCL IPO opens on 9 Jan

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL), a subsidiary of Coal India Ltd (CIL), is set to open its initial public offering (IPO) on 9 January, marking the first public issue of 2026. The IPO will be closely tracked by Dalal Street as an early gauge of investor appetite for public sector undertakings (PSUs) in the New Year. The company will announce key details, such as price band, lot size and issue structure, on 5 January.

According to the Red Herring Prospectus (RHP), the maiden public issue—entirely an Offer for Sale (OFS) of 46.57 crore equity shares by CIL—will close on 13 January, while anchor investor bidding is scheduled for 8 January. The proposed listing of BCCL is part of the government's broader divestment push in the coal sector, aimed at unlocking value in Coal India's subsidiaries and enhancing transparency through market discipline.

Last year, Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Ltd (CMPDIL), another wholly-owned CIL subsidiary, filed draft papers with SEBI for an IPO via the OFS route. BCCL's issue comes after a record year for the primary market, with companies raising nearly Rs 1.76 lakh crore through IPOs in 2025. *—PTI*

'Mandatory CSR spending can hit investor confidence'

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Mandatory CSR spending can reduce perceived corporate benefits, leading to lower investor confidence and a higher cost of equity for Indian companies as investors may interpret the mandated expenditure as a compliance cost rather than a strategic investment, a new study by IIM Lucknow has found.

Centric to the Indian market, the study investigated how mandatory Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spending can impact investors' perspectives, financial risk assessments and the cost at which firms can raise equity capital from the market.

The findings of this research have been published in the prestigious 'Journal of Accounting in Emerging Economies.' *—PTI*

COMBUSTION ENGINES DOMINATE

Luxury EV sales decline by over 3% after GST 2.0 reform

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Electric vehicle (EV) penetration in the luxury car segment has dropped by nearly 3 percentage points in the GST 2.0 era, as conventional internal combustion engine (ICE) versions gain popularity due to better total cost of ownership (TCO). Industry leaders have noted this trend is particularly pronounced in the entry luxury segment, where the price gap between EVs and ICE vehicles has widened under the new GST rates.

Mercedes-Benz India's CEO, Santosh Iyer, observed, "If I look at October and November (2025), it came down by 2 to 3 percentage points... So, the moment the equation changes, we can see a change in (EV) penetration."

Meanwhile, BMW Group India's Hardeep Singh Brar mentioned that despite growth in the ICE portfolio due to GST 2.0, EV demand remains strong, highlighting a 130 per cent YoY increase in BMW and MINI EV sales.

Audi India's Balbir Singh Dhillon asserted ongoing steady demand for their electric portfolio with optimism for a balanced demand outlook in 2026. *—PTI*

Bandhan Bank loans grow 10% to Rs 1.45 lakh cr in Dec quarter

KOLKATA, 4 JAN

Bandhan Bank, a private sector lender, announced a year-on-year growth of 10 per cent in its loans and advances for the third quarter ending 31 December 2025, reaching a total of Rs 1,45,227 crore. This figure compares favourably to Rs 1,32,019 crore reported in the same period last year.

In a provisional business update filed with stock exchanges, the bank revealed that total deposits increased by 11.1 per cent to Rs 1,56,723 crore, up from Rs 1,41,002 crore in December 2024. However, on a quarterly basis, deposits experienced a slight decline of 0.9 per cent from Rs 1,58,075 crore in September 2025.

Retail deposits, including CASA, grew by 17.2 per cent to Rs 1,13,420 crore, with retail term deposits surging by 35.8 per cent to Rs 70,690 crore.

Conversely, low-cost CASA deposits fell by 4.5 per cent to Rs 42,730 crore, leading to a CASA ratio drop to 27.26 per cent. The bank's collection efficiency improved, reaching 98.1 per cent in December, while its liquidity ratio stood at a strong 149.14 per cent. *—PTI*

Vedanta gets nod to file green copper plant plea

CHENNAI, 4 JAN

Following a Madras High Court directive, Vedanta's Sterlite Copper unit can now seek fresh approval from Tamil Nadu authorities for its green copper project.

The court was hearing a writ petition by Vedanta, seeking a direction for the government to decide its representations.

The State's counsel noted that the plant was earlier closed for violations and said the company must file proper applications with the competent authorities rather than mere representations to the Chief Secretary or department secretaries.

The Division Bench of Chief Justices directed that Vedanta's petition be listed on 29 January, noting that its pendency would not prevent the company from filing a fresh application. *—PTI*

Mis-selling significant in insurance sector, says IRDAI report

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Mis-selling is a significant concern in the insurance sector, and insurers need to conduct a root cause analysis to identify the underlying causes, regulator IRDAI said in its annual report.

The total number of grievances registered against life insurers has remained almost the same at 1,20,429 in 2024-25 against 1,20,726 in 2023-24, whereas the total number of grievances registered under UFBP (Unfair Business Practices) has increased from 23,335 in 2023-24 to 26,667 in 2024-25.

The share of UFBP grievances has increased to 22.14 per cent in FY25 compared to 19.33 per cent in the previous fiscal.

Mis-selling involves the sale of insurance products to consumers without proper disclosure of terms, conditions or suitability.

The Union Finance Ministry has repeatedly cautioned banks and insurance companies against the mis-selling of insurance policies to customers.

Mis-selling often leads to higher premiums and as a result policyholders don't renew their policy. *—PTI*

570 MW CAPACITY

Adani Group commences hydro project in Bhutan

THIMPHU, 4 JAN

Adani Group has commenced the 570 MW Wangchhu Hydro Electricity Project in Bhutan, which was initially announced in early September 2025. The foundation stone for the hydro power project was launched in the presence of Bhutan's Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani.

Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC) of Bhutan will hold a majority 51 per cent stake, and Adani Group will have 49 per cent.

In May 2025, the Adani Group and the Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC) of Bhutan signed separate landmark Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to develop 5,000 MW of hydropower projects in Bhutan jointly.

- Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC) of Bhutan will hold a majority 51 per cent stake, and Adani Group will have 49 per cent.

"In a significant step for our energy partnership, we advanced key milestones by signing an MoU for 5,000 MW of hydropower and officially commencing the 570 MW Wangchhu Hydro Electricity Project. I am sincerely grateful for the presence of Hon'ble Prime Minister Dasho @tsheringtobgay at the ceremony to mark this occasion," Gautam Adani posted on X, sharing photographs from his Bhutan visit.

The Wangchhu project will require an investment of about Rs 60 billion to set up the renewable energy power plant and related infrastructure. The project is expected to be completed within five years of groundbreaking. The Wangchhu is the first hydroelectric project to be taken up under an MoU that was signed in May 2025 between the Adani Group and DGPC for jointly developing 5,000 MW of hydropower in Bhutan.

Gautam Adani is a founding member of the Gelephu Mindfulness City. *—ANI*

Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck with Adani Group CEO Gautam Adani **PHOTO: X/@GAUTAM_ADANI**

PHOTO: PTI

Pandya wins silver at Junior National Equestrian C'ship

MUMBAI, 4 JAN

Young equestrian talent Stasya Pandya of Mumbai delivered a commendable performance at the Junior National Equestrian Championship (JNEC), clinching a silver medal in the Dressage Team Event (Children 1 category) here. Competing astride Kirrhi Taonga from Surge Stables, Bengaluru, she scored 67.463 and played a key role in her team's podium finish. Stasya trains and rides at the Amateur Riders Club here under the mentorship of coach Bobin Tshering. The silver-winning team delivered a collective performance with Haripriya Singh astride Fritz scoring 71.243 and Amara Singh astride Count Me In D' Grading scoring 68.581, both representing Sea Horse Equestrian. —*PTI*

Syndrela, Divyanshi start U-19 group stage with wins

VADODARA, 4 JAN

Defending champion Syndrela Das, top seed Divyanshi Bhowmick, and Japan's Miku Matsushima began their girls U-19 singles campaign with impressive wins in the WTT Youth Contender 2026 here on Sunday.Syndrela, who clinched the U-17 title on Saturday, defeated Archismita Mahato 11-7, 11-7, 11-8 in Group 3 while Divyanshi defeated Shrestha Kontham 11-4, 11-3, 11-7 in Group 1.In Group 2, Miku began with an 11-3, 11-6, 11-4 win over Gunjan Kumar. The top seeds in boys U-19 were also assured of a spot in the knockout stage as they registered two wins each in their respective groups.The U-15 top seeds also advanced to the knockout stage with comfortable wins in their groups.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sanjay is ready to lead Indian hockey forward

CHENNAI, 4 JAN

By the time Sanjay completed his media commitments as Kalinga Lancers captain, a day before Hockey India League's second season commenced in Chennai, his side was engaged in a practice match. Sanjay was not on the pitch, but he was the most active player."There are some junior players who might not know the plan well. I discuss it with them. I talk to them openly. A lot of times, the players don't understand what the coaches say. I guide them in such cases, as best as I can," Sanjay told after that game. The 24-year-old will share the armband with Belgium's Arthur Van Doren as the Lancers try to break into the playoffs after a sixth-place finish last year.—*PTI*

Brown pours in 50 points as Celtics routs Clippers

NEW YORK, 4 JAN

Jaylen Brown tied a career high with 50 points, Derrick White added 29, and the sharp-shooting Boston Celtics earned a 146-115 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers, who saw their six-game winning streak end Saturday night at Inglewood, Calif. Anfernee Simons scored 15 points, and Jordan Walsh added 13 points with 13 rebounds as Boston went 4-1 on their road trip while improving to 12-3 since Nov. 30. The Celtics shot 55.2% from the floor as they matched their season high for points in a game. Kawhi Leonard and John Collins each scored 22 points as the Clippers lost for the first time since Dec. 18 against the champion Oklahoma City Thunder.—*PTI*

B'desh won't play T20 WC in India over safety concerns

T20 WC is hosted by India and SL from 7 February to 8 March

DHAKA, 4 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Sunday decided against sending its national team to India for the T20 World Cup next month, citing security concerns and government advice, following IPL franchise KKR's decision to release pacer Mustafizur Rahman onthe BCCI's instruction.

Although the BCCI did not explicitly cite the current relations between the two countries for its decision to seek Rahman's release on Saturday, it did say that the move was triggered by what's been happening all around.The T20 showpiece is to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka from 7 February to 8 March.

Rahman's dramatic ouster from the IPL prompted the BCB to call an emergency meeting on Saturday night, and a day later, it announced that the Board of Directors met again and decided that the national team would not travel to India for the T20 World Cup beginning February 7."The Board reviewed the situation in detail, taking into account developments over the last 24 hours and expressed deep concern over the overall circumstances surrounding the participation of the Bangladesh National Team in matches scheduled to be played in India," said the BCB in a statement."Following a thorough assessment of the prevailing situation and the growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India and considering the advice from the Bangladesh Government, the Board of Directors resolved that the Bangladesh National Team will not travel to India for the tournament under the current conditions. "The International Cricket Council (ICC) will need to address the issue as Bangladesh are scheduled to play all four of its league games in India.

Like the arrangement with Pakistan, Bangladesh wants all of its matches to be shifted to Sri Lanka, the co-host of the tournament.

"In light of this decision, the BCB has formally requested the International Cricket Council (ICC), as the event authority, to consider relocating all of Bangladesh's matches to a venue outside India (co-host Sri Lanka)," read the statement further. —*PTI*

B'DESH NAMES 15-MEMBER SQUAD

■ Litton Das (Captain) ■ Mohammed Saif Hassan (Vice Captain) ■ Tanzid Hasan ■ Mohammad Parvez Hossain Emon ■ Tawhid Hridoy ■ Shamim Hossain ■ Qazi Nurul Hasan Sohan ■ Shak Mahedi Hasan ■ Rishad Hossain ■ Nasum Ahmed ■ Mustafizur Rahman ■ Tanzim Hasan Sakib ■ Taskin Ahmed ■ Md Shaifuddin ■ Shoriful Islam

BAD LIGHT STOPS PLAY

Root and Brook guide England to 211-3 in final Ashes Test

SYDNEY, 4 JAN

Joe Root and Harry Brook shared a 154-run partnership to guide England to 211-3 before bad light stopped play on Day 1 of the final Ashes test, which featured an emotional on-field tribute for the Bondi terror victims and first responders.

Root and Brook joined when the tourists were at a perilous 57-3 on Sunday and rallied England through the middle session before bad light and rain stopped play just before tea and prevented the match from resuming after the interval.

At stumps, Root was unbeaten on 72, and Brook was 78 not out, sharing England's best partnership of the five-test series. Australia has already retained the Ashes with wins in the first three tests.

The duo raised their half-centuries within the same over that their stand hit triple figures as England took control on a pitch that didn't appear to offer too much assistance for Australia's bowlers.

Root made his 67th test fifty off 65 balls with seven boundaries, while Brook completed his 15th half-century from 63 balls in a more streaky fashion, with some big shots narrowly avoiding the catching fielders and frustrating the hosts.

"I've just got to be a little bit more patient and take my ones here and there," Brook said. "It's just about staying in my own bubble, really, and not getting too far ahead."

England lost three wickets in quick succession midway through the morning session after Ben Duckett and Zak Crawley had got the tourists away to a swift start after England captain Ben Stokes won the toss and chose to bat.

Mitchell Starc ended their partnership at 35 when he teased an edge from Duckett (27) through to wicketkeeper Alex Carey for his 27th wicket of the series.

Stumps England 211 for 3 (Brook 78*, Root 72*, Neser 1-36) vs Australia —*PTI*

Leeds held by Man Utd in a 1-1 draw

LEEDS, 4 JAN

Leeds United and Manchester United played out a 1-1 draw in the Premier League on Sunday after Brenden Aaronson's opener was cancelled out by Matheus Cunha in three chaotic second-half minutes.

In a scrappy but goalless first half, United had a goal ruled out for offside when Cunha volleyed home from range, while Leeds' in-form striker Dominic Calvert-Lewin saw a glancing header come off the post.

Leeds broke the deadlock in the 62nd minute when Aaronson was put through on goal by Pascal Struijk , but their lead lasted less than three minutes when substitute Joshua Zirkzee set up Cunha for the equaliser.

The game sprang into life in the last half-hour, and both teams had opportunities to find a winner in an entertaining second half. But ultimately they shared the spoils as United moved provisionally up to fifth while Leeds are 16th. —*PTI*

Kyrgios and Kokkinakis victorious in emotional comeback in Brisbane

BRISBANE, 4 JAN

Thanasi Kokkinakis and Nick Kyrgios reprised their triumphant Australian Open partnership by winning their opening match at the Brisbane International on Sunday, as the 'Special Ks' also marked their return from long-term injuries. It was the first match on the ATP tour in 167 days for Kyrgios, while Kokkinakis played for the first time since suffering a pectoral injury in January 2025, as the pair beat Matthew Ebden and Rajeev Ram 5-7, 6-4, 10-8."I'm about to tear up," an emotional Kokkinakis said in the post-match interview. "It's crazy.

I haven't played a match in 12 months... I underwent surgery a year ago with no guarantee I would be back playing. So it's been a long year, a challenging one, a lot of times, where I thought the game was done for me.—*PTI*

DOING BEST TO HOST OLYMPICS IN 2036: MODI

VARANASI, 4 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asserted that India is preparing with full strength to host the 2036 Olympic Games, and declared his government was committed to providing "more and more players greater opportunities to compete" by hosting mega sporting events in the country.

Addressing the inaugural function of the 72nd Senior National Volleyball Championship, being held here, via video conference, Modi said the government was making every possible effort to provide exposure to budding athletes to take up Olympic sports, and schemes like Khelo India were proving a game-changer in harnessing talent. "The 2030 Commonwealth Games will be held in India, and the country is making strong efforts to host the 2036 Olympics, to give more and more players greater opportunities to compete," said Modi."Through the Khelo India campaign, hundreds of youth have had the chance to advance to the national level," added Modi.Noting that initiatives like the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPs) were transforming the sports ecosystem in India, with efforts focused on building strong infrastructure, funding mechanisms, and providing young athletes with global exposure, he said that the country's growing clout in sport could be gauged from the fact that India had hosted 20 top-notch international competitions in the last 10 years. —*PTI*

Tyson Fury comes out of retirement again

NEW YORK, 4 JAN

Former world heavyweight champion Tyson Fury announced on Sunday that he will return to boxing in 2026.

Fury has not fought since losing to Oleksandr Usyk in a bout for three of the four major world titles in December 2024.

But the 37-year-old British star posted on Instagram on Sunday: "2026 is that year. Return of the Mac. Been away for a while, but I'm back now, 37 years old and still punching. Nothing better to do than punch men in the face and get paid for it." Fury also said he was retiring from the sport after beating Dillian Whyte in April 2022, only to return later in the year. Fury's history of retirement followed by U-turns meant few believed his most recent claim to end a career that had brought 34 wins in 37 contests. —*PTI*

Shrachi Bengal Tigers beat Ranchi Royals 1-0

RANCHI, 4 JAN

Agustina Gorzelany (37') scored the winner as Shrachi Bengal Tigers recorded a 1-0 win over Ranchi Royals in the Women's Hockey India League here on Sunday.

With this win, the Bengal Tigers moved to the second position in the points table.

The Ranchi Royals came into this contest high on confidence with two consecutive wins and started the game with their midfield controlling the tempo in the opening exchanges.They had five penalty corners and seven circle penetrations in the first quarter, but couldn't find a way past Jennifer Rizzo in goal for the Tigers. —*PTI*

SG Pipers eyes a fresh start under new coach

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Tim Oudenaller PHOTO: PTI

For SG Pipers, last season of the men's Hockey India League was a harsh reality check. Even with Australian Graham Reid, one of the most respected and successful coaches in world hockey, at the helm, the team finished last in the table, leaving fans and players alike searching for answers.

This season, the Pipers are trying to turn over a new page. With two-time Olympic bronze medallist P. R. Sreejesh guiding from the sidelines as mentor and Tim Oudenaller of the Netherlands stepping in as head coach, Delhi is charting a fresh course.

Oudenaller, 41, may not have coached a senior national team in his career, but he still brings a wealth of experience. He served as the assistant coach for the Netherlands U 21 side during the recent FIH Junior Men's World Cup, and his club record is impressive. At HC Kampong, one of the top Dutch clubs in the Hoofdklasse, Oudenaller steered his team to the 2023 24 league title and a Euro Hockey League summit clash in the same season.

With a mix of mentorship, tactical acumen, and European league experience, the Pipers will be hoping that the 2025–26 season will be the one in which they literally rise from the ashes. —*PTI*

Martyn wakes from a life-threatening coma

SYDNEY, 4 JAN

Former Australian cricketer Damien Martyn has made a "miraculous turnaround" and is now able to talk after coming out of an induced coma due to a bout of meningitis, according to his former teammate Adam Gilchrist.

"He has responded extraordinarily well since coming out (of the coma) to the point where his family feels it's like some sort of miracle,'' said Gilchrist to Code Sports.

"It has been so positive that they're hopeful he will be able to move out of the ICU into another part of the hospital, which is representative of what a great recovery it's been and how quickly it has flipped around.'' The 54-year-old Martyn fell ill while lying down last week and was rushed to the hospital. He was diagnosed with meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Known as one of the game's great stroke-makers, Martyn became a key figure in Steve Waugh's all-powerful Australian side, hitting 13 centuries and averaging 46.37. —*PTI*

AHEAD OF AUSTRALIAN OPEN RECORD

Venus Williams is 'feeling the fire' at 45

SYDNEY, 4 JAN

Seven-time major singles champion Venus Williams said Sunday she's still driven to play good tennis - and "it gives you great legs" - as she prepares for an Australian Open tilt at age 45. Williams will become the oldest woman to play in the main draw at the season-opening Grand Slam after accepting a wildcard, five years after she last competed in Melbourne. The American said she was unaware of the record she was poised to break, adding that she didn't have the same intense approach to achieving milestones as she did in her prime.

However, her drive to succeed on the court remained.

"I think one of my goals is to be joyful and just embrace being uncomfortable because that's the things champions can do," she said.

"I definitely don't wake up and come halfway across the world or more than halfway to not be feeling the fire.

"And, well, tennis burns a lot of calories. It gives you great legs. I figure if I want to stay fit, I've got to keep playing."

A five-time Wimbledon champion, Williams was an Australian Open singles finalist in 2003 and 2017 and won the doubles title four times alongside sister Serena.

Williams' last tournament was the US Open in August, just a month after returning from a 16-month break.

She will play warmup events in Auckland next week and Hobart ahead of the 18 January 1 February Australian Open, and hopes she can shake the rust out of her system.

"It's interesting because I have so much experience, but I've probably played the least amount as any other player in this draw," Williams told reporters in Auckland.

"So I have a lot to pull out, but I also have to come out of the gates playing quickly.

"The good news is that, you know, tennis matches are long, and you have a chance to figure things out." —*PTI*

Emma pulls out of Naomi Osaka tie at United Cup

NEW DELHI, 30 OCT

Emma Raducanu's return to tennis has been delayed after the Briton pulled out of her tie against Japan's Naomi Osaka at the United Cup mixed team event in Perth on Sunday.

Raducanu has struggled with form and fitness problems since her U.S. Open triumph as a teenager in 2021, but she rediscovered her rhythm in a run to the Miami Open quarterfinals last year before ending her season prematurely due to physical issues.

The 23-year-old Briton was set to play her first match since October against Osaka as she builds up her preparations for the Australian Open Grand Slam, but team captain Tim Henman said the tie had come too early."I have to be honest, she was very close," Henman told Australian broadcaster Nine. "It wasn't an easy decision. She had been building up and practising really well. But we just felt this morning it was a little bit too early." —*PTI*